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The 20-time grand slam champion says the Laver Cup in London next weekend will be his last tournament

Anger at 'obscene' plan to axe banker bonus cap

Chancellor warned he risks return to pre-2008 era

ROB MERRICK
DEPUTY POLITICAL EDITOR

A plan to end the cap on bankers' bonuses during the cost of living crisis has led to outrage before next week's emergency Budget. Chancellor

Kwasi Kwarteng was condemned for seeking to benefit the top City earners while public sector workers are told to show restraint to keep inflation in check. The proposal would also make a mockery of promises to "level

up the country" by giving "a rocket boost" to London, critics argued. Unite boss Sharon Graham said workers would be "appalled" while Labour MP Margaret Hodge said: "Thinking about bankers at this stage is obscene."



Editorials

The lessons of the financial crisis have been forgotten

Even if it was a brilliant idea to remove the cap on bankers' bonus payments, the timing is exquisitely inept. Most of the nation – for a change, this encompasses the comfortably off – is faced with an unparalleled squeeze on living standards, a doubling of fuel bills (even under the government's energy price "guarantee") and inflation hurtling towards 20 per cent a year.

The investment bankers – we are not talking about the branch manager at the local Halifax – are already paid sums that look like Lotto wins. Now the government wants to give them a little extra. Well, quite a substantial bit extra, in many cases.

Indeed, Kwasi Kwarteng and Liz Truss appeared to take delight in throwing in a 1 per cent cut in their national insurance contributions. All this, as well, when Downing Street has set its face adamantly against a windfall tax on the super-profits made by the energy producers. None of this will encourage wage restraint in the public sector, or elsewhere. It will, though, create resentment.

It seems tin-eared, but Mr Kwarteng takes himself seriously as a conviction politician, with most of his policies apparently designed to take the Conservative Party back to its neglected

free-market instincts. Ms Truss sees herself similarly, and appears to be strongly influenced by Mr Kwarteng. It is the kind of messaging that won her the party leadership and her place at the head of the nation because it goes down well with Tory activists who long to hear less about fairness and more about the small state. The chancellor's problem is that the voters do not share his enthusiasm. Perhaps, being cynical, it seemed a good day to slip news like this past a distracted public.

There is a case for reviewing bankers' remuneration. It may well be, as Mr Kwarteng apparently believes, that the bonus restrictions in the UK are making the financial services sector less competitive in comparison to its east Asian and American counterparts. Paris is cited as a new rival with advantageous tax rates.

But there is a reason, seemingly neglected, why these bonuses were constricted: the financial crash of 2008, and the ensuing recession and costly nationalisation of the big banking groups. To put things at their simplest, huge bonuses distorted incentives in parts of investment banking, promoting risk-taking and eventually bank failures. The interests of bankers and traders were poorly aligned with those of taxpayers in a world to whose economy the global investment banks were so central.

We are still living with the consequences of past mistakes in deregulation, and the lessons are too quickly forgotten. To take a few disparate examples, the outbreak of "mad cow disease" in the 1980s occurred because animal feed rules were relaxed. The Grenfell disaster has its origins in the building regulations. And loopholes in employment legislation allowed P&O summarily to sack its ferry staff. Ms Truss and Jacob Rees-Mogg are actually now promising more of the same, supposedly in the cause of seizing those elusive Brexit "opportunities".

Britain is also still paying for the errors made in the eras of "self-regulation" and "light touch", between the "Big Bang" upheavals in 1986 and the crash two decades later. Britain followed the misguided path set by the US in the 1990s, when Washington weakened the division of high-street and investment banking

established in the 1933 Glass-Steagall Act – itself a reaction to the crash of 1929 and the subsequent slump.

Now, having nationalised the oversized banks and their losses, the UK has the burden of a higher national debt than it would have had otherwise, and the cost of servicing it diverts funds from public services. This gave us a decade of austerity. It cannot happen again, or be contemplated even as a small acceptable risk in a distant future: the downside is just too horrendous.

There is a strong case, therefore, for keeping the ban on bonuses and allowing the American and Asian banks to steer themselves over the cliff if that is what they wish to do. The British taxpayer has better things to do with their money than rescue the bankers from their own greed – again.

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Chancellor 'risks return' to the era of financial crash by axing cap on bank bonuses



'Nurses given real-terms pay cuts. City executives given unlimited bonuses,' says TUC chief (Getty)

ROB MERRICK
DEPUTY POLITICAL EDITOR

An “obscene” plan to axe the cap on bankers’ bonuses while households face a cost of living crisis has engulfed the new government in controversy, ahead of a mini-Budget next week. The new chancellor, Kwasi Kwarteng, was condemned for seeking to let pay rip for top earners in the City of London, while public sector workers are told to show restraint to keep inflation in check.

The proposal to remove the cap, in a bid to boost sluggish growth, is also a “huge risk” by threatening to repeat the blunders that led to the devastating 2008 financial crash, he was warned. It would also make a mockery of promises to “level up” the country” because it would give “a further rocket boost” to London, the financial services centre, critics argued.

But there was no sign that Mr Kwarteng will back down – as Boris Johnson did after a similar backlash earlier this year – and he appeared to receive the tacit backing of the Bank of England.

Introduced in 2014 in response to the financial crisis, the cap limits bonuses to a year’s salary, rising to two years if shareholders approve. Before this, the ratio of bonuses to salaries in UK finance was 410 per cent, leading to widespread concern that the potential rewards for risk-taking were encouraging reckless behaviour.

According to government figures, the average starting salary for a corporate investment banker is £30-40,000, rising to £50-70,000 after three years. At the top, rewards are stratospheric, with more than 3,500 bankers in the UK earning over £1m (£865,000) in 2019 and the highest paid on a basic salary of £6.3m. This compares to average basic pay of £29,692 a year across all jobs in the UK in July this year.



Kwasi Kwarteng will deliver a mini-Budget next Friday, having vowed to 'do things differently under fresh leadership' (Getty)

Union leaders led the criticism, with the Trades Unions Congress pointing to real-terms pay cuts being imposed on public sector workers while “millions are struggling to keep their heads above water”.

“Nurses given real-terms pay cuts. City executives given unlimited bonuses,” said Frances O’Grady, the TUC general secretary.

Unite boss Sharon Graham said workers would be “appalled and angry”, adding: “When millions are struggling to feed their families and keep the lights on, the government’s priority appears to be boosting the telephone-number salaries of their friends in the City. Britain’s economy is now dominated by rampant profiteering. Removing the cap on bankers’ bonuses will make that worse.”

Gary Smith, general secretary of the GMB union, accused ministers of “rank hypocrisy”, when they have previously claimed that higher wages for others would destabilise the economy. “Apparently frontline workers asking for a pay rise risks increasing inflation, while allowing fat cat bankers to trouser monstrous bonuses ‘attracts talent’ and ‘boosts the city,’” he protested.

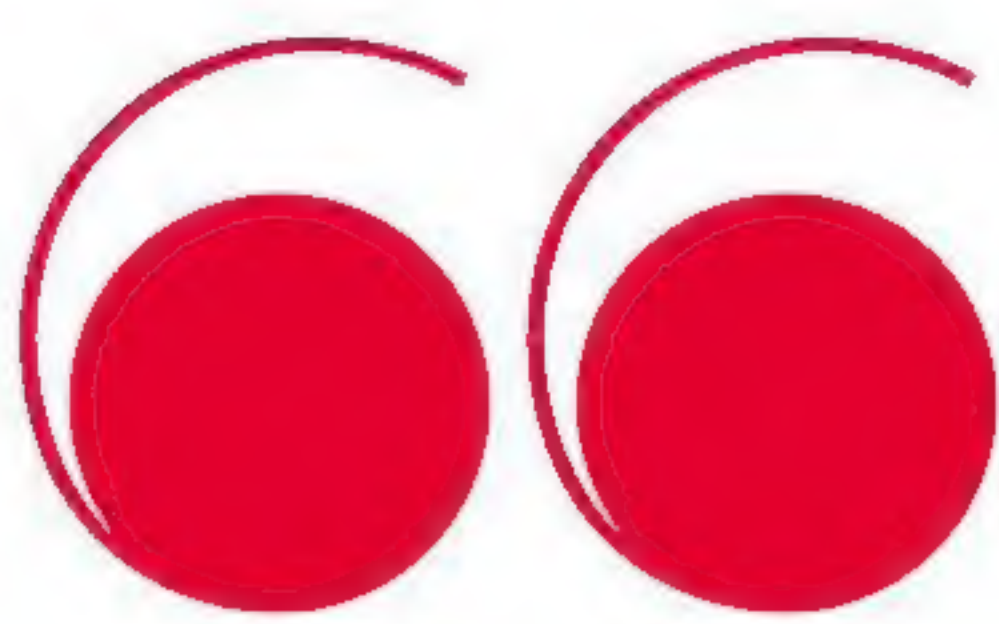
The Labour MP Margaret Hodge, who campaigns against “dirty money” in the City, said bonuses for mergers and acquisition

bankers were already at record levels of £2.6bn – even with the cap in place. “Thinking about bankers at this stage is obscene. Whose side is everybody on, really? she asked, adding: “We’re beginning to see the signs of what the new economics of Liz Truss is all about.”

Luke Hildyard, executive director of the High Pay Centre think tank, said: “Removing the cap would be a pro-rich ideological measure that sends a depressing message about who policymakers listen to and think about when making economic policy.”

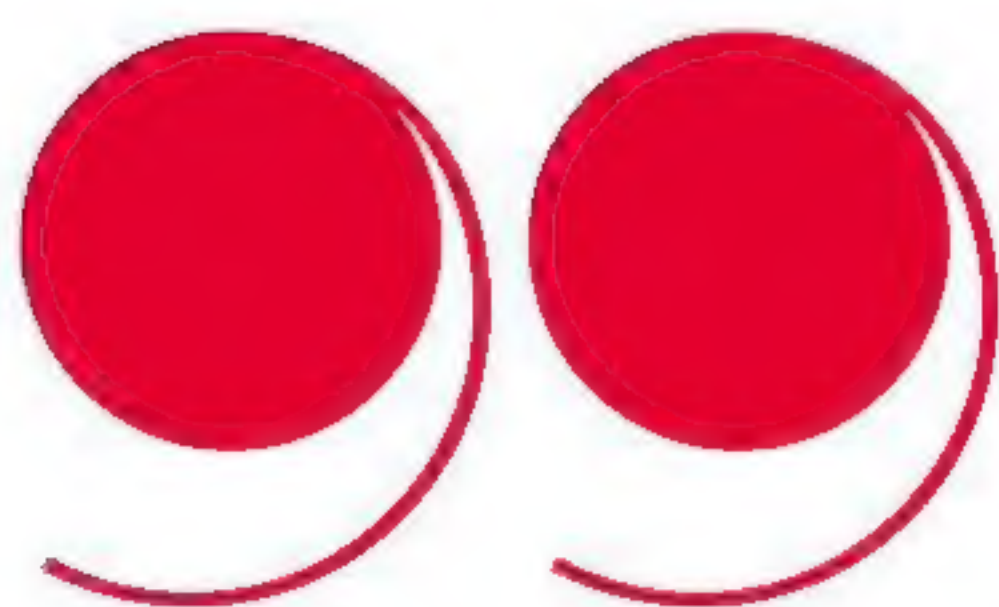
Mick McAteer, a former Financial Conduct Authority board member, attacked a “bad idea” that would encourage the kind of aggressive risk-taking seen before the 2008 crash. It would create incentives for “misselling of toxic socially useless financial products”, he warned, saying: “I’m not sure it’s appreciated just how dangerous fierce competition can be.” Mr McAteer added: “What does scrapping the bonus cap mean for levelling up? Why give London a further rocket boost?”

Vince Cable, the former Liberal Democrat business secretary, called it a “disastrous step revisiting mistakes before the financial crisis”, saying of the Tories: “They never learn from history.”



What does scrapping the bonus cap mean for levelling up? Why give London a further rocket boost?

Mick McAteer, ex-Financial Conduct Authority board member



The cap, introduced by the EU in the teeth of UK opposition, requires bonuses to be limited to no more than 100 per cent of fixed pay, or double that with shareholder approval.

Downing Street refused to comment on what is planned, during the mourning period for the Queen, and the Treasury signalled that no decisions have been taken. But Mr Kwarteng is anxious to boost London's competitiveness against New York, Frankfurt, Hong Kong and Paris, according to people briefed on the discussions. The cap has annoyed US investment banks that employ tens of thousands of staff in London because Wall Street typically offers lower fixed salaries with big performance-related bonuses.

The chancellor will deliver a mini-Budget next Friday, having vowed to "do things differently under fresh leadership" and return annual economic growth to 2.5 per cent. But it is possible that Mr Kwarteng will leave changes to the City of London to a later date – with next week's "fiscal event" already set to include £30bn of tax cuts for the wealthy.

He received backing from Philip Augar, a former leading banker, who – while agreeing that the image of axing the cap was "absolutely terrible" – agreed it was flawed and that removing it could boost the City. "It's made things worse because banks have simply got round the cap by increasing salaries, and that means they're locked into a very high total compensation package," he told BBC Radio 4. "It's a globally competitive industry. Pay rates are set, not in London or in Europe, but in New York, and I can understand the idea that you might want to make London more competitive by freeing up the cap."

The Bank of England, meanwhile, made known that it "did not support the bonus cap when it was introduced".

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Kwarteng's massive gamble belongs in the wastebasket



The new chancellor seems to want to give the whales as many free spins with our money as they desire (AFP/Getty)

JAMES MOORE

CHIEF BUSINESS COMMENTATOR

Buckle up. Thanks to Kwasi Kwarteng, it looks like bankers' bonuses are coming back and London's financial casino will get the go-ahead to reopen its doors, so the recipients can roll the dice with our money.

The new chancellor seems to have forgotten – or wilfully ignored – one of the most important parts of his job. It is, before he even gets out of bed in the morning, to ask this crucial question: will my plans make it more or less likely that a big bank tips up and proceeds to set off a disastrous chain reaction?

This is something that every finance minister, watchdog and central banker worth their salt should consider too before they get their first coffee. If the answer is “more likely”, then don’t do it. Move on to something else. If the answer is “maybe more likely”? Don’t do it. Move on. Don’t even spend any more time thinking about it. Put the idea in the waste bin alongside the latest missives from the Bow Group, the Institute for Economic Affairs and the Flat Earth Society.

Still tempted, because it’s only a maybe and risks bring rewards? Oh dear. OK, get a flunky to dig out the cuttings from the financial crisis. Remember that? It seems to have been forgotten, what with Covid, Ukraine, the energy crisis and the cost of living crisis. That is a profound mistake.

The financial crisis very nearly destroyed the world’s economy. At its low point, there were stories doing the rounds about hedge fund managers buying herds of sheep because they thought we were heading back to the days of barter. For a while, we teetered on the brink of armageddon. Do you remember what caused it?

In the run-up to the financial crisis, the bonus boys (they were nearly all boys, which says something if you think about it) went bonkers. The entire financial services industry went bonkers, all in pursuit of enough cash to fill several fleets of G4S trucks, complete with outriders on motorbikes and maybe the odd authorised firearms officer from the Met keeping a watchful eye from a distance.

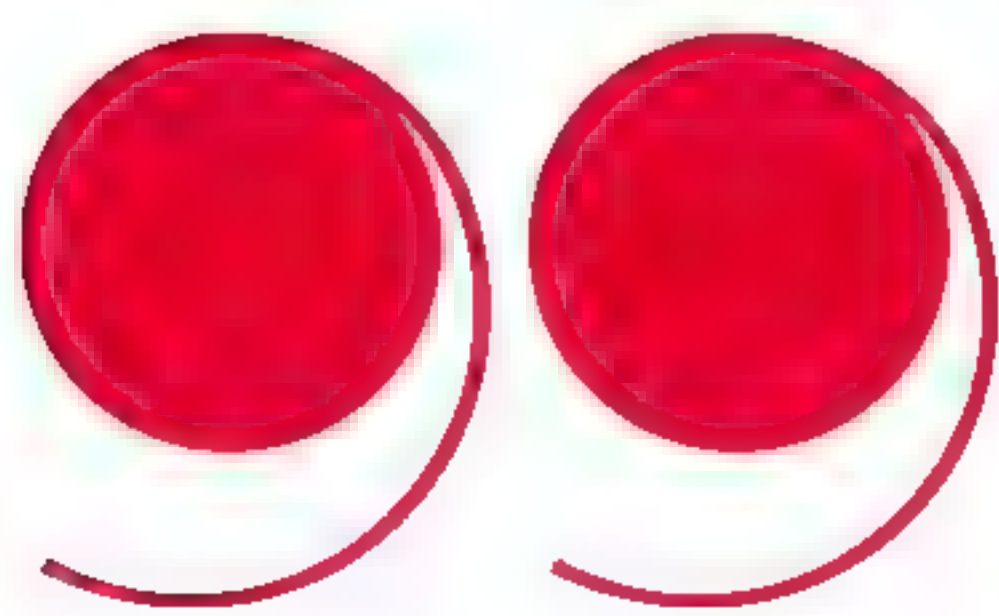
They played endless roulette, craps and blackjack with our money. They put together packages of dodgy mortgages and pushed them onto other financial institutions, pension funds, local councils – you name it. It was the equivalent of spreading financial Covid around the world.

While this was going on, other traders were manipulating interest rates, currency markets, even gold and silver prices, anything they could mess with, all with the aim of bagging a fat bonus cheque at the end of the year. We still don't really know half of what they were up to.

And when they lost? Billions of pounds that could have been spent on building schools and hospitals, and paying the people working in them properly, were instead diverted into bailing out banks. Kwasi Kwarteng... read those cuttings.



Is the potential of some extra tax revenues from highly paid individuals really worth the risk of the bonus boys burning down the house and having the taxpayer foot the bill?



That this happened shouldn't have come as a surprise. If people are incentivised to take stupid risks and do bad things, they will take stupid risks and do bad things.

The bonus cap was born of an effort to bring some sanity to the situation. The Bank of England groused. So did George Osborne and the Treasury. It's a bad idea, they said. It will deny banks the flexibility to pay their bigwigs less when they're under the cosh and need to preserve their capital. That argument is highly questionable because banks have a habit of protecting bonus pools even while they're struggling in quicksand, for fear of losing their rainmakers if they don't.

Combined with other measures to limit bad behaviour, the cap ultimately brought a little sense back to an industry that had

none. In its worst year, it racked up nearly £1.5bn worth of fines in Britain alone.

Why would anyone want to return to that? Well, Kwarteng clearly thinks he's found an advantage, having crippled the City of London's position as a global financial centre by yanking it out of the European Union's single market. But an advantage to whom?

Let's assume he's right, and some of the people who've been enjoying the high life in Europe's financial centres, like Paris, Amsterdam, Dublin or, um, Frankfurt (is there a high life to be had in Frankfurt?) return to the City. Who does that really benefit? Is the potential of some extra tax revenues from highly paid individuals really worth the risk of the bonus boys burning down the house and having the taxpayer foot the bill?

Then there are the optics. Let's not forget the optics, because while some financial commentators will ignore them, they are very relevant to this and they are absolutely terrible. Britain is a country in which people are literally going without food and where the demand on food banks is so great that those fine institutions are running out of it. Mr Kwarteng appears not to have noticed.

Worse, he appears to want to turn the watchdogs into their cheerleaders, whose job is to bring in more of this business, rather than keeping an eye on people who don't even need to be given an inch to take it as licence to suit up and sit down at the gaming tables.

He seems to want to give the whales as many free spins with our money as they desire, money which would be better spent on feeding people, all in the hopes that it will fulfil some wild Brexiteer fantasy. Bonfire of vanities? This is a bonfire of crazy which could burn us all.

So, Kwasi Kwarteng, put the idea in that wastebasket where it belongs. Then, if there's someone in the Treasury who is old-fashioned enough to smoke, borrow their lighter and let the proposals burn there before we all get caught up in the flames.

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Basel ballboy whose style took tennis to another level

‘Bittersweet’ retirement for all-time great Roger Federer



‘Tennis has treated me more generously than I ever would have dreamt, and now I must recognise when it is time to end my competitive career’ (Reuters)

JAMIE BRAIDWOOD

Roger Federer, the 20-time grand slam champion and one of the greatest tennis players of all time, has announced his retirement

from the sport at the age of 41.

The eight-time Wimbledon winner will play his final event at the Laver Cup in London next weekend after a 24-year career that saw the Swiss not only dominate tennis but do so with a style and grace that transcended the sport.

His rivalries with Rafael Nadal and Novak Djokovic will be remembered as perhaps the greatest era of men's tennis and Federer will hold a special place in the history of Wimbledon after winning a record eight men's titles.

Federer has not played since his quarter-final exit at Wimbledon last year and has since undergone several knee surgeries.

Although he teased a possible return when appearing at Centre Court's 100-year celebrations in July, he has now confirmed he will retire from professional tennis following next weekend's Laver Cup at the O2 Arena – an event that will see him play alongside Team Europe colleagues Nadal, Djokovic and Andy Murray.

Federer said in a statement: “Today, I want to share some news with you all. As many of you know, the past three years have presented me with challenges in the form of injuries and surgeries. I’ve worked hard to return to full competitive form.

“But I also know my body’s capacities and limits, and its message to me lately has been clear. I am 41 years old. I have played more than 1500 matches over 24 years. Tennis has treated me more generously than I ever would have dreamt, and now I must recognise when it is time to end my competitive career.

“The Laver Cup next week in London will be my final ATP event. I will play more tennis in the future, of course, but just not in grand slams or on the tour.”



Federer received a standing ovation when he returned to Centre Court in July (AFP/Getty)

In a legendary career, Federer also won five US Opens, six Australian Opens, and completed the career grand slam by winning his only French Open in 2009. He held the position of world No 1 for a record 237 consecutive weeks.

Federer also became the first male player to reach 20 grand slam singles titles, a feat that has since been surpassed by both Nadal and Djokovic. But away from statistics, it was the beauty of Federer's game and his single-handed backhand that will see him remembered as perhaps the greatest player of his era.

Federer also defied time by continuing to play at the highest level until his late thirties. He returned from his first knee surgery in 2016 to play some of the best tennis of his career, defeating Nadal to win the 2017 Australian Open and Marin Cilic to win that record eighth Wimbledon crown. His last grand slam title came at the 2018 Australian Open, while he reached his last Wimbledon final the following year, losing in a championship tiebreak to Djokovic in an all-time-great contest.



Federer won his first Wimbledon title in 2003 against Mark Philippoussis (Bongarts/Getty)

“This is a bittersweet decision because I will miss everything the tour has given me,” Federer continued. “But at the same time, there is so much to celebrate. I consider myself one of the most fortunate people on earth. I was given a special talent to play tennis and I did it at a level that I never imagined, for much longer than I ever thought possible.

“The last 24 years on tour have been an incredible adventure. While it sometimes feels like it went by in 24 hours, it has also been so deep and magical that it seems as if I’ve already lived a full lifetime. I have had the immense fortune to play in front of you in over 40 different countries. I have laughed and cried, felt joy and pain, and most of all I have felt incredibly alive.

“When my love of tennis started, I was a ball kid in my hometown of Basel. I used to watch the players with a sense of wonder. They were like giants to me and I began to dream. My dreams led me to work harder and I started to believe in myself. Some success brought me confidence and I was on my way to the most amazing journey that has led to this day. So, I want to thank you all from the bottom of my heart, to everyone around the world who has helped make the dreams of a young Swiss ball kid come true.”

Federer won his first grand slam title at Wimbledon in 2003 as a 21-year-old, starting a run of five consecutive titles at the All

England Club as well as a spell of dominance over the sport. The emergence of Nadal sparked a fascinating rivalry and their duel in the darkness in the 2008 Wimbledon final will be remembered as one of the best of all time. With Djokovic also reaching Federer and Nadal's level, the era of the big three and the titanic battles they shared then defined men's tennis for a decade. After regaining top spot in the rankings in 2018, Federer became the oldest world No 1 in history at the age of 36.

His retirement follows what is expected to be Serena Williams's final appearance at the US Open earlier this month. The 23-time grand slam champion, who shares a legendary status along with Federer, explained her plans to "evolve" away from tennis but Federer was more conclusive with his announcement, signing off: "Finally, to the game of tennis: I love you and I will never leave you."

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Queen's funeral to end with national two-minute silence



The state funeral of Queen Elizabeth II will take place on Monday at Westminster Abbey (PA)

ANDREW WOODCOCK
THOMAS KINGSLEY

A two-minute silence will be held at 11.55am on Monday at the conclusion of the state funeral service for Queen Elizabeth II, it has been announced.

The silence will follow the sounding of the Last Post, bringing to an end a service in Westminster Abbey that will draw together

members of the royal family, visiting monarchs and leaders from around the globe, senior British dignitaries and members of the public.

A congregation of more than 2,000 will be led by King Charles III in saying a formal farewell to the UK's longest-serving sovereign before her body is taken to Windsor Castle for burial alongside her late husband, the Duke of Edinburgh.

Here are the expected times of the key events:

End of lying-in-state

Before the end of the Queen's lying-in-state, a vigil will be mounted by King Charles III, the Princess Royal, the Duke of York and the Earl of Wessex at 7.30pm this evening.

Members of the public will be able to file past the coffin to pay their respects until 6.30am on Monday. Following this, the doors will close in preparation for the procession to Westminster Abbey, where the state funeral service will take place.

Route

At 10.35am the coffin will be lifted from the catafalque on which it has stood in Westminster Hall by pall-bearers of the 1st Battalion Grenadier Guards, of which the Queen was company commander. Her Majesty's coffin will then be moved from Westminster Hall to Westminster Abbey, setting off from New Palace Yard at 10.44am, for the funeral service.

The route to Westminster Abbey, which will be lined by members of the Royal Navy and Royal Marines, will go from Parliament Square to Broad Sanctuary and The Sanctuary.

Procession

The King will lead the procession to Westminster Abbey, which will be made up of 200 musicians from the Massed Pipes and Drums of Scottish and Irish Regiments, the Brigade of Gurkhas, and the Royal Air Force. He will be joined by the Princess Royal, the Duke of York and the Earl of Wessex.

Behind the quartet will be the Queen's grandsons Peter Phillips, the Duke of Sussex and the new Prince of Wales. They will be

followed by the late monarch's son-in-law Vice-Admiral Sir Tim Laurence, the Duke of Gloucester (the Queen's cousin), and the Queen's nephew the Earl of Snowdon.

The Queen's coffin will be carried on the state gun carriage, a 123-year-old apparatus towed by 98 Royal Navy sailors in a tradition dating back to the funeral of Queen Victoria. The procession will arrive at the west gate of Westminster Abbey at 10.52am, where pall-bearers will lift the coffin from the carriage and carry it into Westminster Abbey to begin the service.

Westminster Abbey Service

Doors will open at 8am to allow guests – including US president Joe Biden and French president Emmanuel Macron – to take their seats. Heads of state and overseas government representatives, including foreign royal families, governors general and realm prime ministers, will gather initially at the Royal Hospital, Chelsea, and travel under “collective arrangements” to Westminster Abbey.

Other representatives of the realms and the Commonwealth, holders of the orders of chivalry including recipients of the Victoria Cross and George Cross, and representatives of the government, parliament, devolved parliaments and assemblies, the Church, and Her Majesty's patronages will form the congregation, along with further representatives from the judiciary, emergency services, public services and the professions, and public representatives, totalling 2,000 people.

Members of the British royal family who are not part of the procession from Westminster Hall will have arrived at the abbey and been escorted to their seats in the south lantern. At 11.00am, the state funeral service will begin, led by the dean of Westminster. The prime minister, Ms Truss, and the secretary general of the Commonwealth are both expected to give readings at the service.

Towards the end of the service, at approximately 11.55am, the “Last Post” will sound, followed by two minutes' silence and the national anthem, to finish around 12 noon.

Windsor private service

Following the state funeral, the coffin will be followed by the King, the Queen Consort, the Prince and Princess of Wales and other members of the royal family, who will walk in the procession to Wellington Arch, from where it will be driven to Windsor on the state hearse.

The route to Wellington Arch will be lined by members of the armed forces, from Westminster Abbey to the top of Constitution Hill, and guns will be fired in Hyde Park every minute during the procession.

A committal service will take place at St George's Chapel, Windsor Castle, at 4pm on Monday. At 7.30pm, the Queen will be buried in a private service.

The Queen's final resting place will be the King George VI Memorial Chapel at Windsor Castle, alongside her husband of 70 years, the Duke of Edinburgh. The duke is currently buried in the royal vault but will be moved to be with his wife.

Full timeline for Monday

6.30am: the Queen's lying-in-state ends, marking the public's last opportunity to pay respects to the late monarch. Preparations for the Westminster Abbey service begin.

8am: the doors of Westminster Abbey will be opened for the congregation to begin taking their seats.

10.35am: the coffin will be moved from Westminster Hall to the state gun carriage.

10.44am: the gun carriage will set off, drawn by officers of the Royal Navy followed by the King, members of the royal family, and members of the King's household and the household of the Prince of Wales.

11am: the state funeral will begin, conducted by the dean of Westminster.

11.55am: the "Last Post" will sound, followed by a two-minute silence throughout the United Kingdom, ending with the national anthem.

Noon: the service will end and the coffin will be followed by the King, the Queen Consort, the Prince and Princess of Wales and members of the royal family, who will walk behind it in the procession to Wellington Arch

12.15pm: the procession will set off for Wellington Arch, with the route lined by members of the armed forces, from Westminster Abbey to the top of Constitution Hill, at the Commonwealth memorial gates. The King's Troop, Royal Horse Artillery will witness the departure of the coffin to Windsor.

3.06pm: the state hearse will approach Shaw Farm Gate on Albert Road, Windsor

3.10pm: the procession will step off.

3.20pm: governors general and realm prime ministers will arrive at the west door of St George's Chapel, and will be escorted to their seats in the nave.

3.25pm: members of the royal family not walking in the outdoor procession will arrive at the chapel.

3.40pm: the King and those in the procession will join together as it passes into Engine Court. As before, the Queen Consort with the Princess of Wales, and the Duchess of Sussex with the Countess of Wessex, will follow by car.

3:53 pm: the bearer party will lift the coffin from the state hearse, from where it will be carried in procession up the west steps.

4pm: the committal service will begin. At the conclusion, the King and the royal family will depart from the Galilee porch for Windsor Castle.

7.30pm: a private burial service will be conducted by the dean of Windsor, attended by the King and members of the royal family. Her Majesty is to be buried together with her late husband, the Duke of Edinburgh, at the King George VI Memorial Chapel.

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Heathrow flights halted to avoid noise during funeral



Clear skies: Virgin Atlantic is one of many airlines cancelling flights to and from Heathrow to comply with a temporary ban on planes flying over central London (Simon Calder)

SIMON CALDER

TRAVEL CORRESPONDENT

About 35,000 passengers due to fly to and from Heathrow airport on Sunday, Monday and Tuesday are learning that their

flights have been cancelled or changed. Around 200 flights are expected to be grounded, the vast majority on Monday.

Aircraft movements at the UK's busiest airport will be halted from 11.40am to 12.10pm on Monday, around the two-minute silence to honour the late Queen. Between 1.45pm and 2.20pm, no arrivals will be allowed during the procession of Her Majesty's hearse.

Departures will be more significantly affected. Between 3.05pm and 4.45pm, no departures will be permitted. Normally 68 flights would take off during this spell. The corresponding inbound flights will also be grounded.

From 4.45pm, flightpaths will be diverted around Windsor Castle to minimise noise during the private family service and interment. Around 15 per cent of Heathrow's schedule will be altered, which is equivalent to a moderate weather event.

A spokesperson for the airport said: "As a mark of respect, operations to and from the airport will be subject to appropriate changes in order to avoid noise disruption at certain locations at specific times on Monday. In order to observe these moments on Monday, airlines will need to adjust their schedules accordingly, which will mean some changes to flights.

"Passengers affected by these changes will be contacted directly by their airlines about their travel plans and the options available to them. Heathrow will have additional colleagues in the terminals to support passengers on their journeys and will be regularly updating its website with passenger advice.

"Roads around the airport are expected to be extremely busy and passengers are encouraged to avoid travelling by car to the airport, and to use public transport instead. We apologise in advance for the inconvenience some passengers will experience as a result of these exceptional circumstances."

British Airways is expected to make around half the cancellations, with the bulk affecting flights to and from Europe. Long-haul links, and those to airports in the UK, will be

protected as far as possible. A number of flights will be rescheduled.

A BA spokesperson said: “As a mark of respect for Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II on the day of her state funeral, we have reduced our schedule and re-timed some flights at Heathrow to ensure the skies are quiet at certain moments on Monday 19 September. Our thoughts remain with the royal family and the nation.”

Virgin Atlantic has cancelled four US flights to and from Heathrow and moved one more several hours earlier. Sunday’s overnight flight VS20 from San Francisco to London Heathrow, due to land at noon on Monday, as well as Sunday’s VS142 from Los Angeles, expected at 12.25pm on Monday, have both been grounded.

In the opposite direction, the VS23 to Los Angeles and VS41 to San Francisco – due out at 4.30pm and 5.30pm on Monday – are also cancelled. The departure to Las Vegas on Monday, due out at 3.05pm, will instead leave at 11.30am – before the committal ceremony in Windsor

A Virgin Atlantic spokesperson said: “Working closely with London Heathrow, Nats [the air-traffic control provider] and other airlines, as a mark of respect we’re making some adjustments to our schedule in order to accommodate restrictions that will avoid noise disruption during the ceremonial aspects of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II’s state funeral and committal ceremony.

“We apologise for any inconvenience caused and thank those affected customers for their understanding during this solemn occasion for the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth. Given the scale and complexity of this unique and sad occasion, we recommend that all customers plan their journey to and from the airport carefully and check their flight status before travelling to the airport.”

Aer Lingus has grounded eight flights: three round-trips from Dublin to Heathrow and one from Belfast City. Winds from the west are predicted for Monday. Typically aircraft would

approach Heathrow on a flight path just to the south of Westminster, creating significant noise.

Additional airport disruption is possible due to the movement of flights carrying heads of state, in particular US president Joe Biden. Heathrow has said non-essential shops will be closed on Monday.

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King to lead siblings in vigil beside the Queen's coffin



Elizabeth II's four children will stand in silence for 15 minutes in Westminster (Getty)

ANDREW WOODCOCK

POLITICAL EDITOR

King Charles is to stand vigil with his siblings over the coffin of Queen Elizabeth II in Westminster Hall this evening. The King, Princess Royal, Duke of York and Earl of Wessex will stand in

silence for 15 minutes at the four corners of the catafalque bearing the late Queen's coffin from 7.30pm this evening.

It has not yet been confirmed whether the Queen's grandchildren, including Princes William and Harry, will have their own vigil before her state funeral on Monday. Charles, Anne, Andrew and Edward made a similar mark of respect to their grandmother, The Queen Mother, at her lying-in-state in 2002 and stood vigil over the Queen's coffin earlier this week when it lay at rest in St Giles' Cathedral Edinburgh.



The King, Prince Edward, Princess Anne and Prince Andrew at St Giles' Cathedral in Edinburgh earlier this week (Getty)

Unlike in previous public displays of mourning over the past week, when he has been dressed in civilian clothing, the Duke of York will wear his Royal Navy uniform for the Vigil of the Princes. The disgraced prince was stripped of honorary military titles and was forced to step back from royal duties because of his association with paedophile Jeffrey Epstein.

The Palace also ruled that only active royals of military rank could wear uniforms for the procession which brought the Queen's coffin to Westminster Hall.

However, an exception has been made to allow Prince Andrew – who served in the Falklands – to wear a uniform for the vigil “as a mark of special respect” to his mother. During the lying-in-state, a round-the-clock vigil in six-hour shifts has been held by troops of the Household Division and Body Guards.

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Harry 'will wear uniform' for vigil in palace reversal



Royals including Prince Harry walk behind the Queen's coffin – the Duke of Sussex served in the army for a decade (Getty)

RORY SULLIVAN

Prince Harry will be allowed to wear military uniform at a vigil with his cousins beside the Queen's coffin tomorrow, royal sources have suggested. The Duke of Sussex has worn civilian dress at all official events following the death of his grandmother, since he is no longer a working royal.

The 38-year-old was dressed in a morning suit on Wednesday as he walked behind the late monarch's coffin with his relatives, most of whom wore military uniform. The restriction prompted outrage from some commentators, who noted that the prince had served in the army for a decade and had completed two tours in Afghanistan.

Earlier this week, Prince William's younger brother sought to quell such criticism by saying everyone's focus should be on his grandmother's life rather than on what he was wearing. "[Prince Harry] will wear a morning suit throughout events honouring his grandmother. His decade of military service is not determined by the uniform he wears and we respectfully ask that focus remain on the life and legacy of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II," his spokesperson said.

Now, it seems that royal officials have had a change of heart. "Common sense has prevailed," a royal source told the *Daily Mirror*. "It was a ludicrous situation given the Duke of Sussex has served his country and is a highly respected member of the armed forces with everything he has done for veterans.

"It is important that the Queen's grandchildren are all made to feel welcome and comfortable as they grieve their beloved grandmother together."

Harry will reportedly be joined at tomorrow's vigil by his brother, the Prince of Wales, and the Queen's six other grandchildren.

Reports suggest that an exception has also been made for Prince Andrew who, as a non-working royal, has also not been permitted to wear military uniform. The disgraced brother of King Charles III will be allowed to do so today as a "special mark of respect" for the Queen.

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‘I cannot do it without the consent of the Bahamians’

PM signals referendum to remove Charles III as head of state



Philip Davis says the Bahamas will be given the chance to decide on its future (Getty)

NADINE WHITE

RACE CORRESPONDENT

The prime minister of the Bahamas has said he will hold a referendum to remove King Charles III as head of state and become a republic. Philip Davis said the decision on the

country's involvement with the British monarchy was a matter for the Bahamian public to decide upon.

Speaking to reporters after signing the book of condolence at the Senate on Tuesday, following the death of Queen Elizabeth, the PM confirmed that having a public vote was on the table, telling reporters “for me, it always is but again it is our people who will have to decide”.

“The only challenge with us moving to a republic is that I can't, as much as I would wish to do it, I cannot do it without your consent,” he continued. “I will have to have a referendum and the Bahamian people will have to say to me, ‘Yes’.”

The move comes after the royal jubilee tour of the Caribbean, led by royal couples Prince William, Princess Kate, Prince Edward and Sophie, Countess of Wessex, was met with protests and calls for slavery reparations in March. By its conclusion, six of the 15 countries that have the British monarch as head of state had expressed a desire to part ways with it.



Kate and William pose with Philip Davis and his wife Ann-Marie during a meeting in Nassau in March (Getty)

The Bahamas National Reparations Committee (BNRC) echoed demands for reparatory justice from Britain in a scathing open letter about the “extravagant” eight-day excursion across Belize, Jamaica and The Bahamas.

“We recognise that the people of the Bahamas have been left holding the bag for much of the cost of this extravagant trip,” the

collective wrote. “Why are we footing the bill for the benefit of a regime whose rise to ‘greatness’ was fuelled by the extinction, enslavement, colonisation, and degradation of the people of this land?

“Why are we being made to pay again? Once William and Kate have passed over the newly paved roads, driven by the freshly painted walls and waved to the schoolchildren who have been pulled out of their classes to stand and watch them go by, what will the Bahamian people be left with?”

The BNRC was founded in 2013 to establish the moral, ethical, and legal case for the payment of reparations by European countries. It sits within the Caribbean Community, the oldest surviving integration movement in the developing world and an intergovernmental organisation of 15 member states throughout the Caribbean.

The Bahamas gained its political independence from Britain in July 1973, and the debate around whether the country, along with other former colonies such as Jamaica, should ditch the monarchy has gathered pace since the death of the Queen last Thursday.

Speaking to *The Independent* last week, Jah Mickey Bowe, vice chair of the House of Rastafari in the Bahamas, said: “We, in the Bahamas, have seen very few examples of how the monarchy benefits our country in any aspect. We don’t see how the celebration of our oppressors helps us any; the royal family should apologise for slavery and bring reparations to all of the Commonwealth countries. King Charles III will meet more of those demands on his desk in the near future.”

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Truss pushes for meeting with Biden ahead of funeral



Hundreds of dignitaries from around the world will be in London to pay their respects (PA)

ADAM FORREST

Liz Truss hopes to hold a private meeting with Joe Biden this weekend when the US president visits Britain for the Queen's funeral on Monday. Their first meeting since the Tory leader became PM would take place against a backdrop of disputes over

the Northern Ireland protocol and difficulties working towards a trade deal with the White House.

Downing Street is set to confirm today who she will be meeting but a number of meetings with visiting world leaders are set to take place at No 10 and the Chevening country residence over the weekend. However, Ms Truss is not expected to meet Chinese vice-president Wang Qishan, who will reportedly be attending the state funeral instead of leader Xi Jinping on Monday.

No 10 said the meetings were not “formal” bilateral meetings, portraying them as chats to offer condolences over the Queen’s death – but said political “issues” would also likely come up. “We will have a significant number of world leaders, heads of state in the country. She will be meeting a small proportion of those over the weekend,” said Ms Truss’s official spokesperson.

“These will be opportunities to discuss memories of Her Majesty, but in some instances it will be the first time they’ve met since she became prime minister ... I’m sure they will also talk about other issues.”

Several hundred dignitaries from around the world will be in London to pay their respects to the Queen, in what is set to be one of the biggest logistical and diplomatic events in the UK in decades. A UK meeting with Mr Biden, who will attend the funeral with first lady Jill Biden, would ease the pressure on Ms Truss’s expected visit to New York for a UN summit next week.

Chevening will be used as one base for meetings rather than the PM’s country residence of Chequers, undergoing what has been described as routine maintenance work after Boris Johnson’s exit. It was unclear whether Emmanuel Macron will be one of those Ms Truss meets but the French president has confirmed his attendance at the funeral after offering his country’s condolences in a call to the King.

Mr Macron tweeted about the “unbreakable” ties between France and the UK, as he promised to “strengthen” the relationship between the UK and France by “following the path”

of the late Queen. During her campaign to become Tory leader she sparked controversy by saying the “jury’s out” over whether Mr Macron is a “friend or foe”.

There have also been suggestions Ms Truss could speak to Irish Taoiseach Micheal Martin around the time of the funeral, amid strained relations over the continuing Brexit row about the protocol. The stress on the relationship comes as Ms Truss’s government has told the EU it will unilaterally continue to suspend border checks on goods moving from Great Britain and Northern Ireland, in a move set to heighten tensions.

Senior Tory MPs, meanwhile, have attacked the decision to invite a senior representative from China to the Queen’s funeral. The vice-president is said to have been invited after some confusion over whether its premier Xi Jinping was on the guest list. “It is incredible that the government would contemplate inviting representatives of the government of China to attend such an important international occasion as the state funeral,” Tim Loughton told *The Independent*.

Ms Truss will also meet Charles III at Buckingham Palace on Sunday morning before attending a reception for world leaders on Sunday evening, No 10 said. The PM is scheduled to make a reading at the Queen’s funeral on Monday. About 500 dignitaries from around the world are coming to London for the state funeral. They will join members of the royal family, former prime ministers past and key figures from public life at Westminster Abbey at 11am on Monday.

The leaders of most Commonwealth countries are expected to attend, with New Zealand PM Jacinda Ardern saying she will make the nearly 24-hour journey. Her Canadian and Australian counterparts, Justin Trudeau and Anthony Albanese, have also confirmed their attendance. Germany’s president Frank-Walter Steinmeier, Italy’s president Sergio Mattarella and Brazil’s president Jair Bolsonaro are among those also attending.

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Migrant labourers lose jobs weeks before World Cup



There is a widespread feeling that the Qatar directive was solely about image (David Harding)

MIGUEL DELANEY

CHIEF FOOTBALL WRITER

Nepali construction workers have been made redundant ahead of the World Cup without proper notice, complete wages or end-of-service benefits, a new investigation has found.

The workers affected include some who work on Stadium 974 and Lusail Stadium, which will both host World Cup matches, as well as a number of other projects connected to the tournament, which begins in just two months. The Lusail Stadium is the venue for the World Cup final.

NGOs and human rights activists had feared workers could be sent home ahead of Qatar 2022, after a government circular reportedly directed companies to reduce workforces and finalise projects before the tournament.

The circumstances affect workers all the more since many took out punishing loans to go and work in Qatar in the first place, only to be sent home without sufficient notice or compensation, leaving them in debt.

While companies can give workers a period off known as “long leave”, they are supposed to provide round-trip tickets but many workers have complained to investigators that this hasn’t been the case.

There is a widespread feeling that the directive was solely about image and not having migrant workers – whose treatment has been such a criticised aspect of Qatar 2022 – so visible for the duration of the tournament.



Many took out punishing loans to go and work in Qatar in the first place (AFP/Getty)

A summation by the Business and Human Rights Resource Centre (BHRRC) relayed allegations against several companies.

Workers at Al Bandy Engineering and Electro Watt report their contracts being terminated without proper notice and not being paid their owed dues. Some of those who protested over months of unpaid wages last month were detained and deported.

Workers at Redco International report losing their jobs without proper notice and receiving full end-of-service benefits, non-payment of wages, failure to provide contracts, payment of recruitment fees and misuse of short-term visas.

Al Samit Manpower is, meanwhile, accused of recruiting workers by telling them they could work on World Cup projects for two years with no issue, only for the workers to report subsequent labour abuse by employees.

Workers at Bin Omran Trading and Contracting report being terminated without proper notice or full dues, being asked to sign a document attesting to having received everything, and non-payment of wages. Employees at Hassanesco complained of being sent home without receiving owed wages, overtime pay or end-of-service benefits.

Both *The Independent* and the BHRRC have approached each company for comment but have not yet received any response.

Fifa, meanwhile, stated: “Fifa is not aware of any policy at the host country level mandating workers to leave Qatar ahead of the Fifa World Cup 2022. However, we are in touch with our counterparts in Qatar and the ILO [International Labour Organisation] to look into specific cases where companies may have terminated contracts in an improper manner.”

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Goldsmith culled as animal welfare minister by Truss



Zac Goldsmith has lost his role at Defra and will no longer attend cabinet (PA)

ADAM FORREST

Boris Johnson ally Zac Goldsmith has been axed as an environment minister and told he will no longer be attending Liz Truss's cabinet, it has emerged.

The Conservative minister has been stripped of his brief overseeing animal welfare at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), government sources confirmed to *The Independent*.

Mr Goldsmith appeared to issue a warning to Ms Truss in an exit letter to Defra staff, saying the government has “so much more to do to turn the tide” on the environment, according to *The Guardian*, which first reported on his sacking.

The Tory peer is said to have written that he was “very sad” to be leaving after a “whirlwind” three years as an environment minister, championing action on climate change as well as better animal welfare protection.

“The UK is, after all, one of the world’s most nature-depleted countries. But if Defra continues to get the backing you need and deserve across government, you can and you will turn the tide,” he wrote.

Lord Goldsmith, made a life peer in 2019 by Mr Johnson who then handed him government jobs, is expected to keep his ministerial role at the Foreign Office, where he still has a brief on the Pacific Ocean and the environment.

However, animal welfare campaigners and farmers have raised fears that his axing at Defra could mean concerns about animal welfare being downgraded when it comes to post-Brexit trade deals.

Lorraine Platt of the Conservative Animal Welfare Foundation – which boasts the former PM’s wife Carrie Johnson as a sponsor – told *The Guardian* that she was disappointed by the loss of Lord Goldsmith’s role. “Our government has always maintained that animal welfare standards will be maintained in any trade deals, but it is vitally important that this is honoured and that our farmers are not undercut by low welfare trade deals,” she said.

Ms Platt added: “We have higher animal welfare standards here than many countries, so they cannot compete ... It is important to the public that animal welfare is advanced, and we hope the

government recognises this and continues to uphold and improve our high standards.”

Dr Alice Brough, a livestock veterinarian from Gloucestershire, recently said: “Liz Truss and [new environment secretary] Ranil Jayawardena’s attitude of prioritising free trade, no matter the cost, has shown shocking neglect for British farmers, and therefore the rest of us struggling with the cost of living crisis.”

Some Tory MPs are worried that Ms Truss may drop Mr Johnson’s Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill, which sought to impose new controls on the kinds of kept animals that are imported or exported to and from Great Britain.

There are also fears that legislative plans for a UK trophy hunting import ban – a Tory manifesto commitment – could be shelved. The former environment secretary George Eustice had said ministers remained “absolutely committed” to a bill, but he was replaced by Mr Jayawardena when Ms Truss named her first cabinet earlier this month.

“I would expect the government to fulfil all its manifesto commitments and pledges on animal welfare, regardless of which individuals occupy roles in various departments,” said Tory MP Henry Smith, who said Mr Goldsmith had been a “fantastic champion of animal welfare issues”.

Some junior ministerial appointments are yet to be made, as politics as usual remains on hold while the nation observes the 10-day mourning period after the death of the Queen. Ms Truss is expected to fill remaining positions next week.

Lord Goldsmith’s office was contacted for comment.

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Coffey's Oxford comma ban is a daft ministerial misstep



Deputy prime minister Theresa Coffey has warned her officials about punctuation (PA)

SEAN O'GRADY

If nothing else, the passing of Queen Elizabeth II after such a long reign reminds us that governments come in all flavours, and that she, like the rest of the nation, lived through good ones and bad. With hindsight, we can see administrations that were bold and brave, took tough decisions, were compassionate or

callous, competent or hopeless, loved or loathed – and sometimes all of those things at the same time.

But the present Conservative administration, dating back to Boris Johnson's appointment in July 2019 and on into the Truss era, has a strong claim to be the most patronising in modern history. Nothing illustrates this more vividly than the "style guide" issued by the new health secretary and deputy prime minister, Therese Coffey.

You might think Dr Coffey, as she likes to be known, would have more urgent tasks confronting her, but somehow in the maelstrom she has spared the time to issue rules of grammar and usage to her officials. Officials who have, let's remember, just emerged from a pandemic, and are struggling with dual crises in health and social care.

Kwasi Kwarteng is about to reverse the 1.25 per cent social care levy that was designed by Johnson and Rishi Sunak to deal with the ageing population and post-Covid backlogs; now there is no longer earmarked funding, and no suggestion as to where the resources will be found. Another crisis.

So, lots to do, but instead of dealing with the grotesque waiting times for an ambulance, for example, Coffey seems more agitated by the Oxford comma, which – useful, irritating, elegant or not – is hardly relevant to the task of saving lives. Indeed, rather more irritating for civil servants than this oddity of punctuation is being told by their minister that, in effect, they can't draft documents properly.

Even if Coffey has a point, it's no way to introduce yourself to those with the power to make your time in office a success. It is better than sacking the permanent secretary, which is what the arrogant Kwarteng did, but hostile nonetheless.

Coffey is not the first minister to issue such unimportant rules. When the self-consciously fogeyish Jacob Rees-Mogg was appointed leader of the House of Commons three years ago, he promulgated rules reviving archaic terms such as "Esq". He did, to be fair, ban the phrase "not fit for purpose", which had gone beyond a cliché, but the initiative suggested a lack of respect for

officials; it seemed to hint that, as they'd not enjoyed an education at Eton and Oxford, they were barely literate. Rather like his later drive against working from home, complete with insulting cards left on empty desks, it's not the way to draw the best from a workforce.

Indeed, these departmental style guides create hassle. Some officials, preparing a memo for the new deputy PM (Coffey) and the new business secretary (Rees-Mogg), won't know where to turn. Rees-Mogg may like "Esq", but what if Coffey thinks it fuddy-duddy? Outranking Rees-Mogg, what if Coffey doesn't want her papers peppered with double spaces after full stops? What if she thinks the Rees-Mogg rules are indeed "not fit for purpose"?

None of this makes for good or efficient governance. A minute spent on making spaces consistent is a minute not spent fixing NHS dentistry. Policy comes before silly rules. In that context, it's also disturbing that the prime minister draws an emoji and writes TL:DR on briefings that are longer than her attention span can contend with.

It is a matter of priorities, and of common courtesy. There is important work to be done, requiring the machinery of government to give its best. It is not a good moment for the government to suggest that it regards the civil service as lazy, disloyal, and illiterate.

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Serving Met officer charged over racist WhatsApp chat

NADINE WHITE

A serving Metropolitan Police officer has been charged with sending racist WhatsApp messages. PC Thomas Phillips, who is based in the force's intelligence branch, faces five counts of sending offensive messages, in breach of the Communications Act 2003.

He is due to appear at Westminster magistrates' court on 24 January 2023 and has been suspended by the force on full pay since December 2021. The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) confirmed to *The Independent* that the charges related to alleged racially offensive messages. Mr Phillips, of Croydon, has pleaded not guilty to all charges and was given bail, the CPS confirmed.

The Met Police said the charges related to an alleged incident that took place while he was off-duty. The case comes after the Met, which is the UK's largest police force, was placed under special measures in June after a series of failures.

Former PC Joel Borders, 45, is on trial at Westminster magistrates' court along with serving Metropolitan Police constables Jonathon Cobban, 35, and William Neville, 34, for allegedly sending offensive and discriminatory messages in a WhatsApp group.

In July, two Met Police officers, in an unrelated case, were sacked after posting offensive messages in a group chat, including a racist joke about Meghan, the Duchess of Sussex. PC Sukhdev Jeer and PC Paul Hefford, who worked in a unit at

Bethnal Green police station in east London, posted “inappropriate, highly offensive and discriminatory” content on WhatsApp in 2018.

In June, James Watts, a former West Mercia Police constable who posted racist WhatsApp memes mocking George Floyd’s murder, was jailed for 20 weeks.

Former Met constables Deniz Jaffer and Jamie Lewis were jailed for two years and nine months each last year for taking selfies with the bodies of murdered sisters Nicole Smallman and Bibaa Henry, and sharing them with friends and colleagues on WhatsApp.

A senior Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) official previously told *The Independent* in relation to other cases that some officers were making “risky assumptions” that unacceptable posts were safe inside private WhatsApp chats.

“That isn’t letting off steam or ‘banter’, it’s deeply offensive and undermining to public confidence and trust,” Claire Bassett, the IOPC’s deputy director general, said. “Being a police officer is a really difficult job and we need to make sure they are fully supported, but misogyny and homophobia doesn’t do that ... some of the stuff we’re talking about here is criminal.”

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Northern Ireland border checks waived, says Truss



The EU is expected to hold off on a further escalation of the row, despite the unilateral move by Liz Truss (PA)

ADAM FORREST

Liz Truss's government will unilaterally continue to suspend border checks on goods moving from Great Britain and Northern Ireland, in a move set to heighten post-Brexit tensions with the EU.

The UK government is understood to have told the European Commission it will extend grace periods in a letter responding to legal action launched recently by Brussels over the failure to comply with the Northern Ireland protocol.

Despite politics as usual being paused while the nation mourns the Queen's death, No 10 responded to the EU's request for a reply to its legal infringement proceedings by the end of 15 September.

It means some food products will continue to be sent from Great Britain to Northern Ireland without the physical checks required by the EU to comply with its single market rules. Brussels is expected to hold off on any immediate retaliation or fresh legal action, as the two sides try to avoid escalation of the row over the protocol.

European Commission spokesman Daniel Ferrie said yesterday: "I can confirm we have received a reply from the UK. We will now analyse the reply before deciding on the next steps."

Ms Truss's Northern Ireland protocol bill – the highly controversial plan to unilaterally override checks agreed in the Brexit deal – remains the biggest sticking point between both sides.

In June the Commission launched legal action against the British government in response to the bill announced by Ms Truss. And in July, Brussels launched four new "infringement proceedings" – accusing the UK of breaking parts of the Brexit deal.

However, the decision to extend grace periods is unlikely to trigger further moves while the prospect of fresh talks aimed at reaching a compromise on the protocol remains a possibility.

Earlier this week, Commission vice president Maros Sefcovic urged Ms Truss to restart negotiations and drop her highly-controversial bill in an interview with the *Financial Times*.

Mr Sefcovic said he wants to reduce physical customs checks across the Irish Sea to just a "couple of lorries a day", claiming there was almost no difference between the UK demand for "no

checks” and the EU’s offer of “minimum checks, done in an invisible manner”.

However, British officials have made clear they see little new in the offer from the EU Brexit chief, and Ms Truss insisted last week that any compromise has to “deliver all of the things we set out in the Northern Ireland protocol bill”.

The UK government has said new elections to the Northern Ireland assembly should be called on 28 October if the impasse at Stormont remains, with the Democratic Unionist Party refusing to rejoin powersharing arrangements until the protocol is ditched.

Despite the Stormont deadline, Mujtaba Rahman – Brexit analyst at the Eurasia Group – said it was in neither side’s interests to make a fuss over the extension of grace periods in the weeks ahead when both are dealing with the Ukraine war and the energy crisis.

“The Commission will effectively let the status quo on grace periods prevail ... the can is being kicked in the short-term,” Mr Rahman told *The Independent*. “But the fundamental problem remains – there is no convergence on the substance of the dispute on the GB-NI border.”

He added: “There remains little or no likelihood that an agreement can be reached, unless Liz Truss is willing to lose the right of her party. The big question is, can the two sides avoid escalation? If the [protocol] bill becomes law ... at that point, the EU will feel compelled to respond, possibly by serving notification of their intention to suspend the [Brexit] trade agreement.”

European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen will be in London for the Queen’s funeral on Monday. Ms Truss will meet a “small proportion” of world leaders attending the funeral at the country mansion of Chevening House and No 10 this weekend.

Ms Truss hopes to hold a private meeting with Joe Biden when the US president visits for the Queen’s funeral, and there are

reports the PM could also meet with Irish premier Micheal Martin, amid ongoing tensions over the protocol.

The PM's official spokesperson could not confirm which leaders she will be meeting. They said the meetings were not formal bilateral meetings, portraying them as chats to offer condolences over the Queen's death – but said political issues were also likely to come up.

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Rugby's 'voice of Wales' Eddie Butler dies, aged 65



Butler died peacefully in his sleep while taking part in a charity trek to Machu Picchu (Tracey Paddison/Shutterstock)

JAMIE BRAIDWOOD

Eddie Butler, the legendary rugby commentator and former international known as the “voice of Wales”, has died at the age of 65.

The broadcaster was a regular part of the BBC's coverage of rugby internationals and his resounding voice and stirring tones made him a much-loved figure.

Butler was taking part in a charity walk for Prostate Cymru in Peru when he died peacefully in his sleep, a statement from the organisation of which he was an ambassador said.

“Over the last week Ed once again showed his generosity and steadfast commitment to good causes by joining 25 Prostate Cymru fundraisers, including his daughter Nell, on the Inca Trail Trek to Machu Picchu,” the charity said.

“In the early hours of Thursday 15 September, Ed passed away peacefully in his sleep at Ecoinka base camp in the Peruvian Andes. He leaves behind his wife Susan and six children, who are very much in our thoughts. The charity will not be making any immediate further comment. We also ask that the family's privacy is respected during this difficult time.”

Before taking up the microphone, Butler was capped 16 times by Wales between 1980 and 1984 and captained the side on six occasions.

He became the BBC's lead rugby commentator following the retirement of Bill McLaren, whose standing as the “voice of rugby” was replicated by Butler's impact – particularly in Wales.

In recent years, Butler formed a broadcasting partnership with the former England player Brian Moore and the ex-Wales fly-half Jonathan Davies.



Butler captained Wales six times after rising to prominence with Pontypool in the 1970s (PA)

Moore offered a touching social media farewell, tweeting: “I am devastated by this news. Ed, I’m sorry I never told you how much I admired you as a broadcaster and as a man. Well, it wasn’t like that between us, was it. Condolences to Sue and your family. Sport has lost an iconic voice. I have lost a very dear friend. Goodbye Edward.”

Welsh Rugby Union chairman Rob Butcher insisted his country owed Butler a sizeable debt for his contribution to the sport. “For many Eddie was the voice of Welsh rugby and he will be sorely missed by supporters around the globe as well as his friends throughout the game and here at the WRU,” said Butcher.

“He proudly represented his country as a player, was a mainstay in press boxes around the world long after he retired from the game and has been prolific in the way in which he has served Welsh rugby in both the written and spoken word over decades.

“Our thoughts and prayers go to his family, who we also know well and cherish, and his close friends and colleagues at this incredibly difficult time. He was a unique individual on the game in Wales owes him a debt of gratitude for his contributions both on and off the pitch.”

The BBC director general Tim Davie also paid tribute to a “wonderful wordsmith” who voiced some of rugby’s most vital moments.

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New drug ‘highly effective’ against eczema in children



Doctors believe dupilumab may soon be approved for children under six in the UK (Getty/iStock)

NILIMA MARSHALL

A new drug therapy has been shown to be “safe and highly effective” in treating moderate to severe eczema in young children. In an international study, dupilumab was shown to reduce the severity of the skin condition within two weeks in patients aged six months to six years during clinical trials. The

children and their parents also reported improved sleep and quality of life.

Based on the findings, published in journal *The Lancet*, doctors believe the treatment may soon be approved for children under the age of six in the UK, after it was licensed in the US in June this year. Dupilumab is already licensed in the UK for adults and for children aged six to 18.

Dr Peter Arkwright, from the University of Manchester, who is the principal investigator for the Manchester arm of the trial, said: “Young children and infants who have moderate to severe eczema have a substantially reduced quality of life. It’s also incredibly stressful for their families, particularly as children’s sleep is so disturbed.

“The fact that infants and young children with moderate to severe eczema are inadequately controlled with creams means they have a high unmet medical need. We’re so delighted that dupilumab has provided clinically meaningful improvement, with an acceptable safety profile. These pivotal trial results strongly support the global approval of dupilumab in infants and children with eczema. It will revolutionise clinical practice worldwide.”

The phase three clinical trial, which was sponsored by biotech companies Regeneron and Sanofi, involved 162 children from around the globe, including patients at Manchester Children’s Hospital. Of the 162 participants, 83 were given an injection of dupilumab, and 79 a placebo, every four weeks alongside the standard therapy of a low-potency steroid cream for 16 weeks.

Results showed that 28 per cent of patients receiving dupilumab achieved a global skin score of 0 or 1, indicating complete and almost complete healing of the skin at week 16. In addition, more than half (53 per cent) of the children showed at least a 75 per cent reduction in signs of eczema and highly significant reductions in itch, alongside improved sleep.

Eczema is a condition that causes the skin to become itchy, dry and cracked. It is more common in children, often developing before their first birthday, and is usually a long-term condition,

although it can improve significantly or even clear completely in some children as they get older.

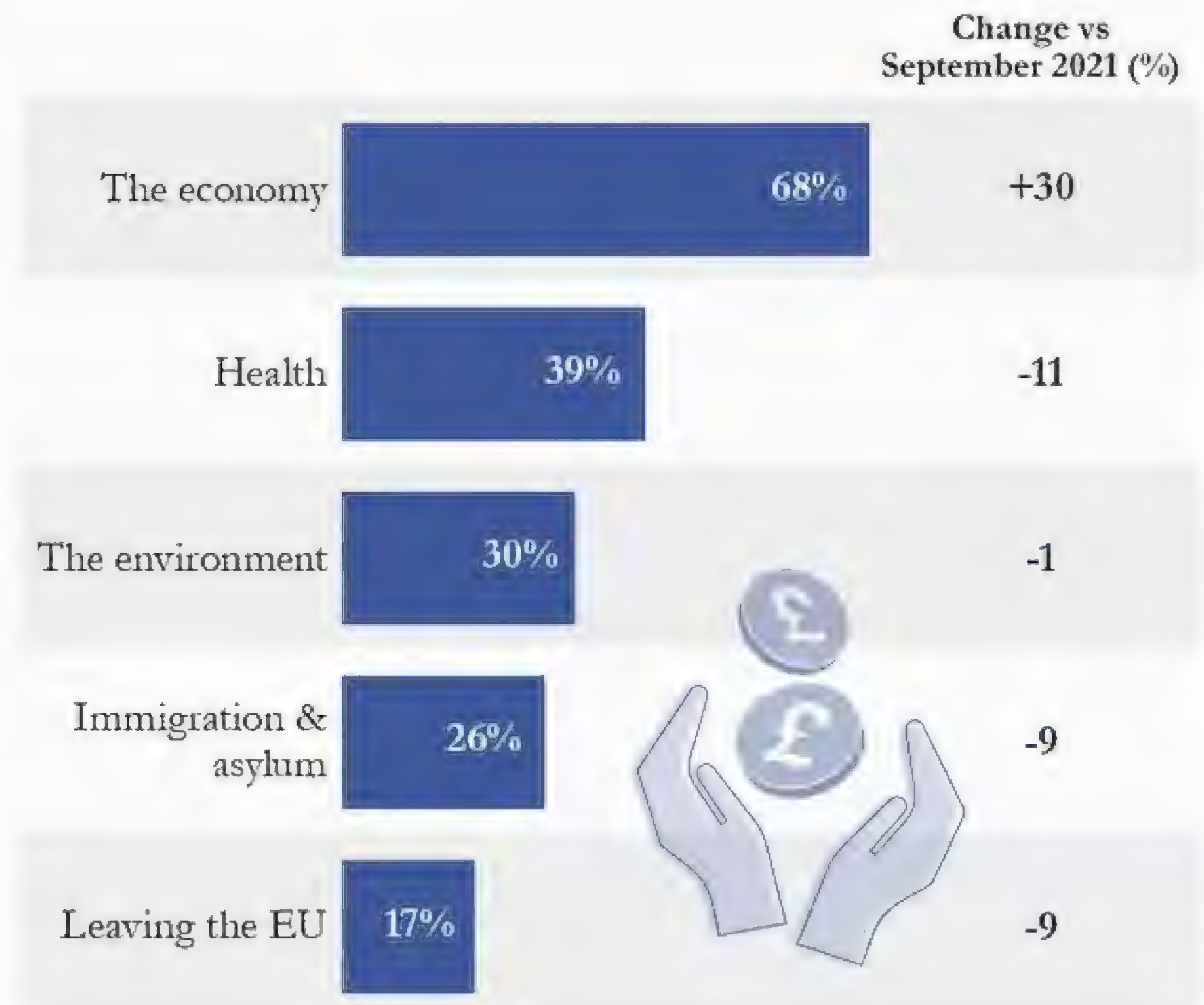
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By Numbers The big issues

Most important concerns facing Britain, according to UK adults (September 2022)



Up to three responses possible. Based on a survey of 1,786 (2021) and 1,799 (2022) British adults.

Source: YouGov



Pictures of the Day



Flower power

Yoon Ji-a poses for photographs with her daughter amid a cosmos flower field at a park in Anseong, South Korea. *Reuters*



On parade

Students take part in a parade at the revolution square in Managua during celebrations commemorating Nicaragua's 201th anniversary. *AFP/Getty*



Basque(ing) in sun

A woman walks along the seaside on a beach in San Sebastian, Basque Country, northern Spain, at dawn. *EPA*



Would you like a test drive, sir?

A man looks at a variety of prams arranged for the 42nd BeFe BabyFair that opened at the Starfield COEX Mall in Seoul, South Korea. *EPA*



Tiger economy of movement

Tiger dancers gesture as they wait to perform during the last day of Onam celebrations in Kochi, India. *AFP/Getty*

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Home news in brief



Mourners wear a 'splash of pink' at the funeral of nine-year-old Olivia Pratt-Korbel (PA)

Mourners dress in pink to honour girl shot dead at home

Mourners dressed in pink gathered in Liverpool yesterday for the funeral of shooting victim Olivia Pratt-Korbel. The nine-year-old was killed after a gunman burst into her home in Dovecot, Liverpool, more than three weeks ago. People lined the street as the schoolgirl's coffin arrived at St Margaret Mary's Church in Knotty Ash on a horse-drawn carriage. The white coffin, with butterflies on the side, was topped with lilies and

unicorn and teddy bear shaped floral tributes were placed alongside it in the white carriage.

In her eulogy, Olivia's mother Cheryl Korbel said she had been born six weeks early and spent nine days in a special baby unit. "She was so small yet even as a newborn she had her own mind." She said the schoolgirl would have made a "great lawyer" because she "had an answer for everything", adding: "Olivia knew exactly how to wrap people around her little finger to get what she wanted, especially her brother Ryan and sister Chloe. She would often give them a cheeky smile and they would give in instantly."

Pupils at St Margaret Mary's Junior School, next to the church, also honoured their classmate by wearing pink yesterday. Olivia's headteacher Rebecca Wilkinson said: "One of the amazing memories that the class teacher and children shared was one day Olivia came to school wearing pink nail varnish and she spent the whole day hiding her hands so that I wouldn't see the fact she was wearing pink nail varnish! So for that reason, as well as a splash of pink, we have said that the children can wear pink nail varnish today if they so wish."

Pre-teens losing 'a night's sleep per week' due to social media

Primary school children could be missing out on the equivalent of one full night's sleep each week due to excessive social media use, a new study suggests. Almost 70 per cent of children surveyed revealed they used social media for four hours a day or more, with 66 per cent accessing it in the two hours before bed, while 12.5 per cent admitted using it in the middle of the night when they should be asleep.

TikTok was the most popular platform accessed by the sample group, with nearly 90 per cent of those surveyed accessing it, while 84 per cent used Snapchat, 88 per cent used YouTube and 57 per cent used Instagram. The small study of 60 children from Leicester found that youngsters who used social media were more likely to report higher levels of fomo (fear of missing out), anxiety, and worse sleep.

Instead of getting the NHS-recommended 9-12 hours each night, the 10- to 11-year-olds in the study were getting an average of 8.7 hours of sleep. The blue light emitted by mobile phones and other devices is also believed to interrupt sleep rhythms, the researchers said.

Two gibbons escape zoo enclosure as visitors evacuated

A zoo was forced to evacuate visitors after two gibbons escaped from their enclosure, sparking an “amber” warning alert.

Paignton Zoo had only just reopened after a two-week closure due to avian flu when the incident occurred on Wednesday. One witness said visitors to the zoo were prevented from using one of the pathways at around 1.40pm while zookeepers worked to return the gibbons to their dwellings. Another told *Somerset Live*: “We have all been evacuated now but there are zoo workers running around like crazy.”

Yesterday morning Paignton Zoo issued the following statement: “Yesterday afternoon, two gibbons escaped from their enclosure at Paignton Zoo into trees next to their island home. As a precautionary measure, zoo visitors were evacuated from the area in accordance with our well-rehearsed escaped animal procedure. Zoo staff regularly carry out escape drills and follow a strict protocol for dealing with events such as this.

“Staff were quickly able to recapture one of the animals and the second was contained within a secure area by late afternoon. Contrary to some earlier reporting, at no point during this situation were animals “missing” or unaccounted for, and the animals have not strayed more than 50m from their home. Staff successfully moved the animal from this secure area back to its home this morning and we are now reopen to the public. We are currently investigating the circumstances surrounding the escape.”

Police launch probe into abuse claims at Campbell’s old school

Police Scotland has launched an investigation into historic claims of abuse at a top school BBC presenter Nicky Campbell attended. The broadcaster claimed he had suffered abuse during his time at Edinburgh Academy in the 1970s. The force said the investigation was “live and ongoing” and a dedicated team was looking into the claims.

Campbell made the claims during an episode of his BBC podcast *Different*, saying the experience had a “profound effect on my life”. Later, speaking on his BBC Radio 5 Live show, the broadcaster said: “I was badly beaten up at school by a teacher who was a leading light in the scripture union. My mother took it as far as she could and got a grovelling apology from [the man involved], but was essentially stonewalled and it was hushed up by the school. Those were different times and that has stayed with me all my life.”

The school said it “deeply” regrets the allegations and “wholeheartedly” apologised to those involved. In a previously released statement, the school said: “We have worked closely with the relevant authorities including Police Scotland with their inquiries and would like to provide reassurance that things have dramatically changed since the 1970s. The Academy has robust measures in place to safeguard children at the school with child protection training now core to the ethos of the Academy.”

Meteorite spotted over Scotland could be named after Queen

A meteorite which was spotted over Scotland on Wednesday night could be named after Queen Elizabeth II. The historic sighting is believed to be the first meteorite over Scotland in more than 100 years. Videos from the public showed a streak of light travelling through the sky for about 10 seconds. Experts said it may either be burning space debris or a meteorite, but it did not closely resemble either in the way it fragmented.

Meteorites are named after the location where they are found, said Dr Áine O’Brien, a planetary scientist at the University of Glasgow and a member of the UK Fireball Alliance. “We’ve not seen a Scottish meteor in over 100 years. We have had texts

saying ‘how amazing would it be if it was found in the Queen Elizabeth Forest Park on Monday’. It was over Scotland, where she passed away. If we found it on Monday that would be perfect. It was a beautiful moment, the main thing about these things is the public looking up at the stars. It brings people together these celestial events.”

The mystery object may have landed in the Atlantic, south of the Hebrides, due to the trajectory – or on an island, or in the Irish Sea. The West Coast of Scotland is another possibility. “It’s most likely a meteor,” Dr O’Brien added. “It’s come at such a shallow angle which is what gives it a long streak. It went for about 10 seconds, people saw it from all over.”

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Zelensky appears unharmed following Kyiv car accident

Ukrainian president met with Ursula von der Leyen during her third visit to the city since the beginning of the conflict



Volodymyr Zelensky in the capital city with the European Commission president yesterday (EPA)

MARYAM ZAKIR-HUSSAIN

Volodymyr Zelensky appeared to have shaken off his recent car accident as he was pictured greeting the president of the European Commission in Kyiv yesterday. The Ukrainian president was not seriously hurt in the incident on Wednesday

night, his spokesperson announced on social media, but the cause is still being investigated.

The accident happened as Mr Zelensky was returning from the city of Iziium, where he had been celebrating the success of Ukrainian troops in reclaiming territory from the Russians. “The president was examined by a doctor, no serious injuries were found,” spokesperson Sergii Nykyforov wrote on social media after the accident. He said that medics accompanying Mr Zelensky had given the driver of the private car emergency assistance and put him in an ambulance.

Yesterday Mr Zelensky met with the commission president Ursula von der Leyen in Kyiv, on her third visit to the city since the outbreak of war February. Ms von der Leyen publicly conveyed the wholehearted support of the 27-nation bloc and wore an outfit in Ukraine’s national colours.

“It’s absolutely vital and necessary to support Ukraine with the military equipment they need to defend themselves. And they have proven that they are able to do this, if they are well equipped,” she said. Air raid sirens blared several times in the Ukrainian capital during Ms von der Leyen’s meeting with Mr Zelensky, highlighting the continued risk of Russian attack.

Speaking at a joint press conference, Ms Von der Leyen said she was impressed with the speed at which Ukraine is progressing in its bid to become a member of the European Union. She said that she would address “how to continue getting our economies and people closer while Ukraine progresses towards accession” to the bloc – a stage that is likely to be some years away.

“The accession process is well on track. It’s impressive to see the speed, the determination, the preciseness with which you are progressing,” said Ms Von der Leyen. She added that the EU needs to do as much as possible to ensure that Ukraine has “more business, more income”.

On a day when political optics stood out, the UN General Assembly said it would vote on whether to make a procedural exception that would allow Mr Zelensky to deliver a pre-recorded address to a meeting of world leaders next week.

The proposed document, to be voted on today, would express the concern of the 193-member body that leaders of “peace-loving sovereign states” cannot participate in person “for reasons beyond their control owing to ongoing foreign invasion, aggression, military hostilities that do not allow safe departure from and return to their countries, or the need to discharge their national defence and security duties and functions”.

Yesterday, the European parliament completed the drawn-out process of approving a €5bn (£4.4bn) preferential loan to Ukraine, the key part of a €9bn (£7.8bn) aid package to offset the cost of the war. Mr Zelensky said that more assistance cannot come quickly enough. He insisted that the West needed to impose more sanctions on the Kremlin and to provide more weapons for his frontline soldiers to use.

The president said that the only way to guarantee the security of Ukrainians was to “close the sky” over the country using air defence systems provided by Western allies. He said that Ukraine had not yet received a positive response from Israel on the possible supply of air defence systems, adding that the systems promised previously by Germany and the United States had also yet to arrive in Ukraine.

Germany announced yesterday that it would send two additional Mars II multiple-launch rocket systems to Ukraine, as well as 50 Dingo armoured vehicles. German foreign minister Annalena Baerbock also put pressure on chancellor Olaf Scholz to decide whether to supply advanced tanks to Ukraine while its counteroffensive was gaining traction.

“In the decisive phase that Ukraine currently finds itself, I also don’t believe that it’s a decision which can be delayed for long,” Ms Baerbock said.

Having little with which to repay his Western partners, Mr Zelensky said Ms von der Leyen’s name would be engraved on a plaque in a square near Ukraine’s parliament known as the “Walk of the Brave”. “Here are the names of those leaders of Europe and the world who supported our state and were on our side against the aggression,” he said.

Meanwhile, a mass grave allegedly containing 440 bodies has been discovered near a city recently recaptured from Russian forces, a Ukrainian official has said. The site in the eastern city of Izium also included the bodies of people who had been killed by shelling and airstrikes, regional police official Serhiy Bolvinov said yesterday.

Mr Bolvinov, the chief police investigator for Kharkiv region, told Sky News that forensic investigations would be carried out on all of the bodies. “I can say it is one of the largest burial sites in a big town in liberated (areas)... 440 bodies were buried in one place,” he said.

Commenting on the discovery in his nightly televised address, Mr Zelensky said: “A mass grave of people was found in Izium in the Kharkiv region. The necessary procedures have already begun there. More information – clear, verifiable information – should be available tomorrow.”

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Putin reveals Xi's 'concerns' about Ukraine at summit



The Russian president told the Chinese premier that Moscow backs Beijing's One China policy (AP)

DAVID HARDING
MARYAM ZAKIR-HUSSAIN

Vladimir Putin has hinted at frictions in Russia's relations with China by publicly admitting Beijing has "questions and concerns" about Moscow's military operation in Ukraine, which has suffered devastating setbacks in recent days.

Speaking at a high-level summit in Uzbekistan yesterday, Mr Putin surprisingly acknowledged potential disharmony with Xi Jinping in his first face-to-face meeting with the Chinese leader since Russia's invasion in February.

“We highly value the balanced position of our Chinese friends when it comes to the Ukraine crisis,” the Russian president told Xi at their first meeting since the war began. “We understand your questions and concern about this. During today's meeting, we will of course explain our position.”

Mr Xi did not mention Ukraine in his public remarks but Beijing's support for the invasion is seen as essential for Moscow in the face of Western sanctions and Russia's need for markets for its energy exports and imports of hi-tech goods.

The last time the two men met they signed a “no limits” friendship agreement between their two countries. Three weeks later, Russia invaded Ukraine. Since then, China has trodden a careful line, criticising Western sanctions against Russia but stopping short of endorsing or assisting the military campaign.



Xi, Putin and Mongolia's president Ukhnaa Khurelsukh in Samarkand (Sputnik/AFP/Getty)

The apparent friction comes after a week of the fastest Ukrainian gains since the war's early weeks. Mr Putin has yet to publicly comment on the setback suffered by his forces after Ukrainian troops made a rapid advance through the frontline last week. Russian troops have abandoned dozens of tanks and

other armoured vehicles in haste. Kyiv says it recaptured more than 3,000 square miles this month.

Mr Putin and Mr Xi are attending the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation in Uzbekistan, a grouping of largely authoritarian states seen by some as a growing power bloc rival of the West. Mr Putin told the Chinese president that Moscow backs Beijing's One China policy, opposes "provocations" by the United States in the Taiwan Strait, and said Russia values China's "balanced position" on Ukraine.

It is Mr Xi's first trip outside China since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. Mr Putin threw his weight behind Beijing and referred to China's insistence that other countries do not recognise Taiwan. "We intend to firmly adhere to the principle of One China," said the Russian president. He added that Russian "condemns provocations by the United States and their satellites in the Taiwan Strait".

The United States has no formal diplomatic relations with Taiwan but is bound by law to provide the island with the means to defend itself. China has never ruled out using force to bring Taiwan under its control.

"In the face of changes in the world, in our times and of history, China is willing to work with Russia to play a leading role in demonstrating the responsibility of major powers, and to instill stability and positive energy into a world in turmoil," Mr Xi told Mr Putin.

China held blockade-style military drills around Taiwan after US House speaker Nancy Pelosi visited the island last month. Taiwan strongly rejects China's sovereignty claims.

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World



How Russian oil continues to flow despite sanctions

Restrictions are a weapon in the struggle to throttle Putin's war effort but energy products are making their way to the US and Europe via third countries, reports **Shweta Sharma**



A new report says Russia sent significantly more oil and coal to India and China over the summer than at the start of the year (AP)

Russian energy is continuing to flow into the US, member nations of the European Union and other countries that have imposed the toughest sanctions on Moscow, potentially blunting

the sting of sanctions designed to cripple the Kremlin's ability to finance the war in Ukraine.

While a large number of Western allies have agreed to halt the import of Russian crude and refined oil products as punishment for Vladimir Putin's invasion, other countries have refused to do so and are taking advantage of the crisis to score major discounts. India is arguably the prime example of this, with its imports of cheap crude oil from Russia increasing from zero in January and February to a record 950,000 barrels per day in June.

And at the same time, major Indian refiners on the west coast – which is the leading destination for Russian crude – are selling on huge quantities of refined products to the US and Europe, two leading oil analytics firms tell *The Independent*. Once India has processed the oil and sold it on, it is impossible to say exactly how much of the end product can be traced back to Moscow, but analysts agree that at least a “small percentage” will have started its journey in Russia and ended up in a country that has enacted Ukraine-related sanctions, though not necessarily specific to energy.

Petro-Logistics, a Geneva-based oil trade analytics firm, estimates in a report that 308,000 barrels a day of Indian oil products refined from Russian crude are being exported since the war began in Ukraine. Of that amount, it estimates that 113,000 barrels per day (37 per cent) are going to Asia, including some countries with sanctions on Russia, and 26,000 barrels per day (8.4 per cent) are going to Europe.

The proportion of India's exports of clean petroleum products – such as kerosene or diesel – going to Europe rose to 15 per cent this year, up from 13 per cent last year, according to the analyst Kpler, which tracks oil on a vessel-by-vessel basis. The UK now accounts for 3 per cent of India's exports of clean products, up from 1.4 per cent in 2021.

Kpler says that the scale at which India is now importing Russian oil means it is “highly likely” that at least some of it is ending up in countries that have imposed sanctions on Russia.

While June was the peak, over the first eight months of 2022 India's purchases of Russian oil averaged 460,000 barrels per day. That compares with just 28,000 barrels per day over the same period in 2021, Kpler says.



A worker stacks oil barrels at a filling station in Chennai (AFP/Getty)

“Given that Russian crude has accounted for nearly 20 per cent of Indian crude imports in recent months, it seems highly likely that countries that have banned or pivoted away from Russian crude imports are still importing clean products that have been refined from Russian material,” says Kpler’s lead oil analyst, Matthew Smith. “What is interesting, however, is that the US has a ban in place on Russian energy since April, but is importing all manner of products from Indian refiners.”

On 8 March, US president Joe Biden signed an executive order to ban “the import of Russian oil, liquefied natural gas, and coal to the United States” in order to “deprive President Putin of the economic resources he uses to continue his needless war of choice”, the White House said in a statement.

Speaking to *The Independent*, Kannan Ramaswamy, an energy sector expert from Arizona State University, agrees that there is a “very good possibility” of Russian oil reaching countries that have ostensibly stopped buying it, and that it would not be a stretch to say that this is being done deliberately in a way that obscures the origins of the cargo.

“We should not be surprised if some of the sanctioned oil reaches the shores of the sanctioning countries, as this would not be the first time that companies and countries have threaded their way carefully to avoid the sanctions trap,” he says.

“Although the volume of origin-obfuscated crude is very difficult to determine, it has been proven that countries do have the means to trans-ship fairly sizeable cargos.”

A refinery in Jamnagar belonging to India’s largest business conglomerate, Reliance Industries, is the leading destination for Russian crude oil. The Jamnagar refinery has also accounted for nearly 80 per cent of India’s exports bound for the US – and 70 per cent of those to Europe – this year, Kpler estimates.

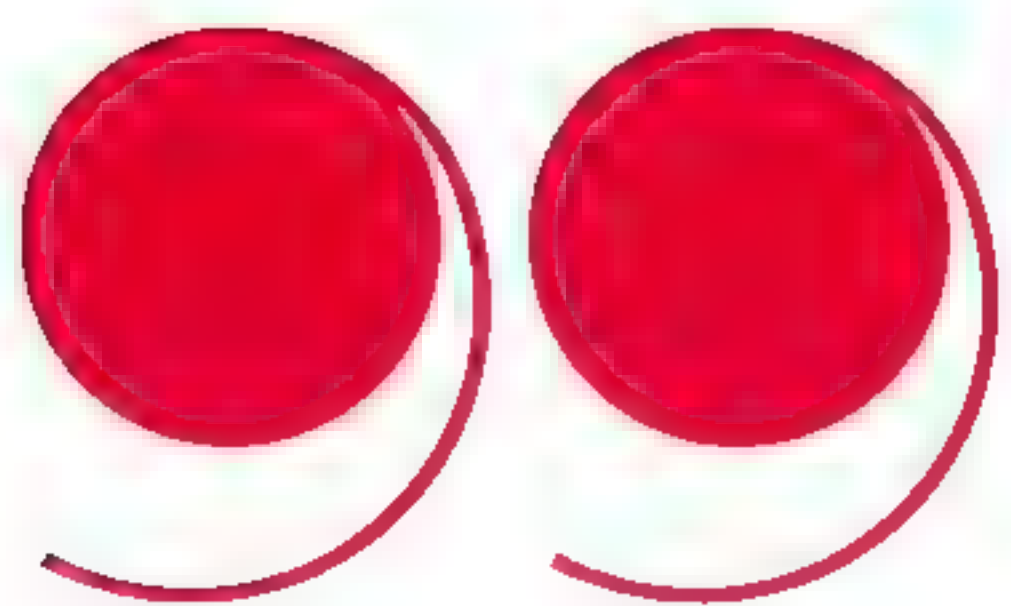
Among countries that have imposed sanctions of some kind on Russia – not necessarily on energy – the top importers from India are South Korea, importing 31,000 barrels per day, Singapore, importing 23,000 barrels per day, and the US. Australia and the Netherlands are also among the top importers of oil products from India.

Mr Smith says that China and India – the largest and third-largest oil importers in the world – are the “biggest beneficiaries of the war with Ukraine”. “[This] is because they are able to buy Russian crude at a steeply discounted rate,” he says. “India is in a doubly advantageous position, because it can refine that cheap crude and can then send those refined products back into Europe.”

Daniel Gerber, chief executive of Petro-Logistics, tells *The Independent* that it takes a fairly simple analysis to say that at least some Russian crude oil is making its way, via third countries, into countries with some form of sanctions on Russia in place. He says that this conclusion was reached after assessing each specific cargo that discharges in India, including those from Russia.



PM Modi's instructions were that we need to think about our people first. If some problem arises in the world, we should not interfere in it



“The world knows that Russian crude oil is being purchased by Indian refiners,” Mr Gerber says. “Our simple analysis shows that a small percentage of India’s product exports are created by refining Russian crude oil. An even smaller percentage of those product exports may be going to countries with some form of sanctions on Russia (not necessarily energy-related).” But he acknowledges that it is very difficult, if not impossible, to track the origin of individual barrels (and indeed molecules) of oil after the products have gone through a refinery system and been stored in tanks.

Mr Ramaswamy says the sanctions imposed by the West are a case of “overpromising while under-delivering”, as the intent is not being followed up with robust enforcement. At the same time, he would not dismiss them as having failed.

While lashing out at the West for exhibiting “double standards” in its response to the Ukraine conflict, Denis Alipov, the Russian ambassador to India, has said that the boom in India-Russia trade is proof that Western sanctions have failed. “Those in the West who criticise India not just slyly keep silent about the fact that they themselves actively buy Russian energy resources, exempting them from their own illegitimate sanctions, but in doing so explicitly demonstrate their

unprincipled position and double standards while claiming otherwise,” Mr Alipov said.

India, which has a long history of pursuing a non-aligned strategy in international politics, has expressed concern at the conflict in Ukraine, but has neither directly criticised Russia for its invasion of Ukraine, nor joined the West in imposing sanctions. New Delhi has sought to justify its increased purchases of oil, saying it is the job of the government to look out for its own citizens’ interests and that the imports are part of a critical “inflation-management strategy”.



Narendra Modi has told his ministers to put India first
(Reuters)

“PM Modi’s instructions were that we need to think about our people first,” Indian foreign minister S Jaishankar said when asked about the issue. “If some problem arises in the world, we should not interfere in it. This too is a sort of a dogma. Maybe in 1950-60, we did not have capability. We had our own interests. But now, just a few days back, we have reached No 5 in the world in economy.”

Mr Ramaswamy agrees that Western criticism of India for purchasing more Russian oil is “misplaced”, calling it a classic case of “do what I say but not as I do”. “Every single Western power has a record of self-serving behaviour at the expense of the common good. It is amazing hypocrisy to expect India to be more ‘cooperative’ than others,” he says.

India's own economic needs, its history of friendly relations with Russia and its general policy of international non-alignment mean it would be more surprising if New Delhi did not take up the steep discounts on offer from Moscow, he argues.

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Sweden's PM concedes defeat to right-wing bloc



Magdalena Andersson says her rivals 'have a thin majority but it is a majority' (Reuters)

ALISHA RAHAMAN SARKAR

Sweden's incumbent Social Democrats prime minister Magdalena Andersson formally offered her resignation yesterday after conceding defeat in a closely fought election, making way for a bloc of anti-immigration right-wing parties.

Ms Andersson, who was the Nordic country's first woman prime minister and led the nation's historic bid to join Nato,

announced she would step down with less than 0.1 per cent of votes remaining to be counted.

“I will therefore request my dismissal as prime minister and the responsibility for the continued process will now pass to the parliament speaker and the Riksdag,” Ms Andersson said.

She added that “the preliminary result is clear enough to draw a conclusion” that her centre-left forces had lost power. “In parliament, they have a one- or two-seat advantage,” Ms Andersson said. “It’s a thin majority but it is a majority.”

The outgoing prime minister pointed out that despite losing the majority, the Social Democrats retained more than 30 per cent of the vote. Ms Andersson was a popular leader but citizens have been reportedly concerned over the rise in crime rates in segregated districts that are home to large numbers of immigrants.

Populist Sweden Democrats leader Jimmie Akesson declared victory for the bloc, adding his party would be “a constructive and driving force” in the work of rebuilding safety in Sweden. It was “time to put Sweden first”, he said. “Now it will be enough with the failed Social Democratic policy that for eight years has continued to lead the country in the wrong direction,” Mr Akesson said.



Ulf Kristersson (left), leader of the Moderate Party, and Jimmie Akesson, leader of the Sweden Democrats (AFP/Getty)

The right bloc of four parties – Moderates, Sweden Democrats, Christian Democrats and Liberals – had held a one-seat lead after Sunday's election but looked like getting 176 seats in the 349-seat parliament to the centre-left's 173 seats.

Ulf Kristersson, the leader of the Moderate Party, is expected to lead the bloc and form a government. "Now we will get Sweden in order," he wrote on Facebook. "The Moderates and the other parties on my side have received the mandate for the change that we asked for. I am now starting the work of forming a new, effective government," Mr Kristersson said.

Although there has been no formal agreement between the parties about how they would govern the nation, centre-right parties have said they will not approve ministerial positions for the far-right Sweden Democrats.

In a major shift in Swedish politics, the Sweden Democrats, who were once shunned by the citizens due to being founded in the 1980s by neo-Nazis, garnered nearly 20 per cent of the vote. Ms Andersson told reporters on Wednesday that she understood those concerned at the party's growing popularity. "I see your concern and I share it," she said.

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Pakistan floods cause surge in dengue and malaria cases



The situation has the makings of a human catastrophe, say health officials (AP)

SAMUEL WEBB

Pakistani health officials are warning cases of dengue and malaria will rise in the wake of the devastating floods that have affected 33 million people.

The swelling waters of the Indus River have wreaked havoc as heavy rains and massive flooding unleashed devastation across much of Pakistan, leaving nearly 1,500 dead since the middle of June.

Rescue and evacuation efforts are still underway in some parts of the country, and health experts are reporting a spike in dengue, malaria and severe gastric infections because many displaced people are living near stagnant water.

About 3,830 cases of dengue fever have been reported by health officials in southern Sindh province, with at least nine deaths, but Dr Abdul Ghafoor Shoro, secretary-general of the Pakistan Medical Association, fears the figures do not reveal the true extent of the problem – and that cases will rise.

He told the BBC: “Overall, the situation in Sindh is very bad: we are organising medical camps all over the province. Most of the cases we are seeing now are of dengue patients followed closely by malaria.

“The dengue burden is the same all over the province and it’s increasing daily. When we checked with the laboratories, the suspected cases are around 80 per cent of tests being done.”



Victims of the floods in Pakistan queue for aid (AP)

This year’s floods have been one of the worst in Pakistan’s recorded history with several aspects pointing to the human-induced climate crisis as the underlying reason behind the large-scale devastation.

Apart from Pakistan, neighbouring Afghanistan, Bangladesh and India have also witnessed severe flooding this year after a record-breaking heatwave.

South Asia is one of the most vulnerable regions to the worsening impacts of the climate crisis despite very little contribution to the creation of the problem. Both Pakistan and Bangladesh have less than a 1 per cent share of carbon emissions.

Dr Khosa added: “We are trying our best but my biggest fear is that we’re sitting with the makings of a human catastrophe. So many people are getting sick – it’s dengue cases, malaria and gastro problems and we can’t help them all.

“So what’s going to happen? Of course there are going to be deaths, and we have to try to save them.”

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Texas governor sends two busloads of migrants to the home of US vice president



The migrants arrive outside Kamala Harris's residence at the Naval Observatory in Washington DC yesterday (EPA)

GUSTAF KILANDER
IN WASHINGTON DC

Two migrant buses sent by Texas governor Greg Abbott, carrying between 75 and 100 people, arrived outside the home of vice president Kamala Harris in Washington DC.

The buses arrived yesterday morning after setting off from Del Rio, Texas, according to Fox News Digital. The Naval Observatory, the vice president's designated residence since 1974, is located in northwest Washington DC. Some of the migrants were picked up in Eagle Pass, which, like Del Rio, is situated along the border with Mexico.

Fox News Digital reported that the migrants came from Venezuela, Uruguay, Colombia and Mexico. The conservative outlet reported that some of the migrants said they believe the border is open. The buses arrived in the US capital not long after Florida Republican governor Ron DeSantis sent two planes carrying migrants to Martha's Vineyard, an island off the Massachusetts coast, on Wednesday.

Attempting to make a point about border control, right-wing governors have been sending migrants to progressive areas. Fox News Digital reported that a member of Sanctuary DMV came to the scene, telling the migrants they would be heading to a church in the area. Sanctuary DMV describes itself as an "all-volunteer solidarity group resisting policies [and] practices targeting immigrants in DC, Maryland [and] Virginia".

Group member Marla Bustillos told Fox News Digital that they had been "at Union Station since six in the morning waiting" and "just heard 20 minutes ago that the drop-off was this one". "We've already set up a church and ... a safe location for them to tell us where they need to go next, where they have relatives," she added.

Ms Bustillos said she was "surprised" to see the media present on the scene "before we could get here".

"So the press knew the location before we did, some of the volunteers ... it's very frustrating," she said. "We're gonna make it happen, but it takes a lot of resources, a lot of effort."

Mr Abbott has sent a large number of buses carrying migrants to cities run by Democrats, such as New York, Chicago and Washington DC. To DC alone, he has “sent at least 9,400 migrants” since April “in an effort to push responsibility for border crossers to Democrats”, according to *The Guardian*.

Last week, DC Mayor Muriel Bowser announced a public emergency, making funding available to respond to the influx of migrants bussed in from Texas and Arizona. The funding will also be used to create the Office of Migrant Services, which will be providing temporary housing, medical care, transportation, as well as other services.

DC Council member Brianne Nadeau blamed the situation on the Republican leaders of Texas and Arizona. “So, it’s been said, but it’s worth reiterating, that the governors of Texas and Arizona have created this crisis. And the federal government has not stepped up to assist the District of Columbia,” she told the press last week. “So we, along with our regional partners, we’ll do what we’ve always done. We’ll rise to the occasion.”

The Independent contacted the office of Governor Abbott for comment.

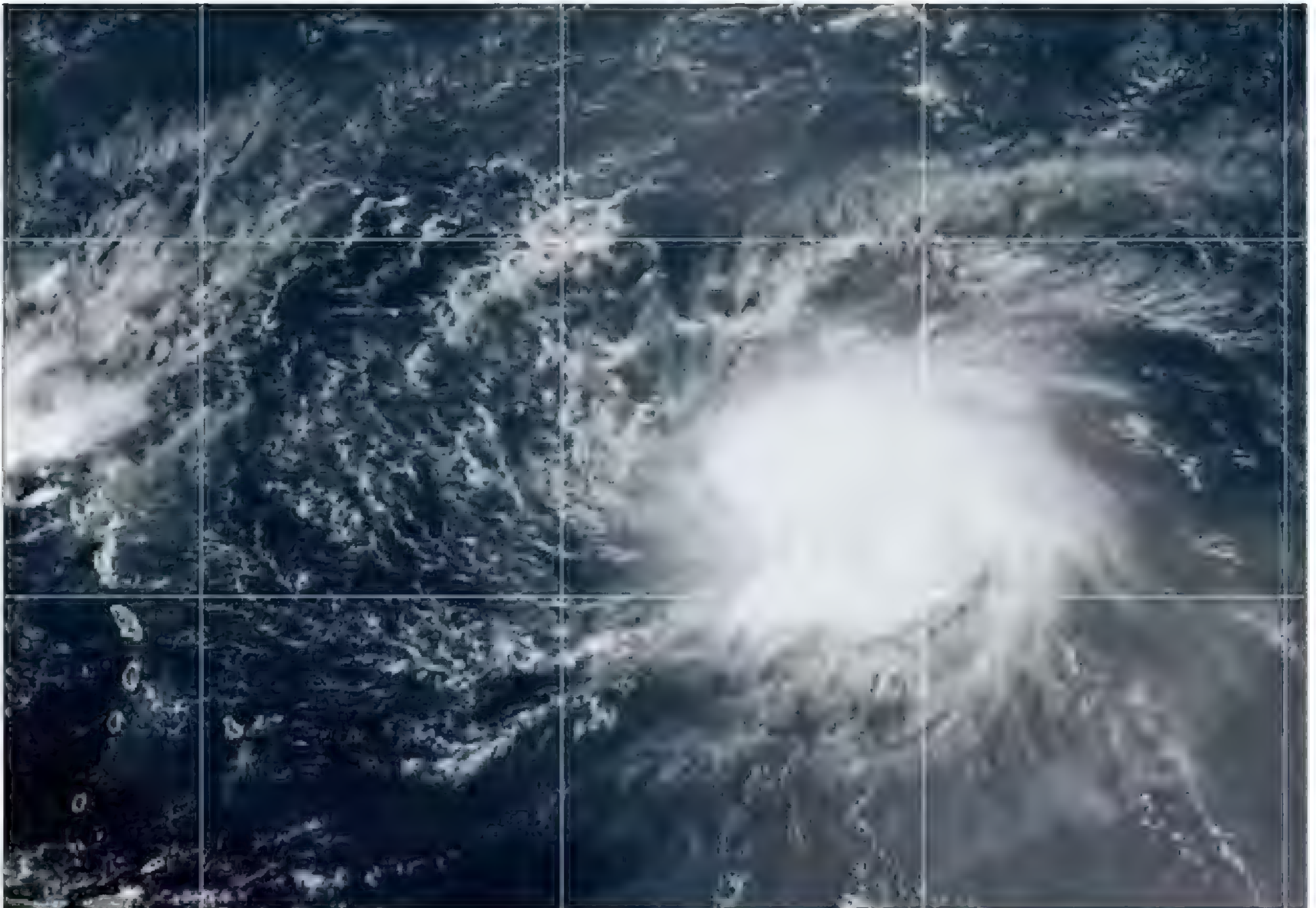
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World news in brief



Tropical Storm Fiona has formed and is heading towards the eastern Caribbean (CIRA/NOAA)

Tropical Storm Fiona set to hit Puerto Rico this weekend

Tropical Storm Fiona has officially formed in the Atlantic Ocean and is on a collision course with the eastern Caribbean. The cyclone is set to hit St Kitts and Nevis, Antigua and Barbuda, and other nearby islands by tonight. It is then forecast to keep moving eastwards, bringing tropical storm-force winds to Puerto Rico tomorrow.

Up to eight inches of rain in parts of the island, combined with winds up to 50mph (80 km/h) could bring challenges for Puerto Rico.

Rico – which faced serious devastation from Hurricane Maria almost five years ago exactly.

Fiona is not currently forecast to become a hurricane in the next few days, the National Weather Service says. In addition to high winds, between three and six inches of rain are likely to fall in the storm's path, including in Puerto Rico and possibly the Dominican Republic, as the storm heads further east.

Woman arrested in South Korea for murder of children

South Korean police yesterday arrested a 42-year-old woman and charged her with the murder of her two children, whose bodies she allegedly disposed of in abandoned suitcases in New Zealand in 2018. Authorities said she was “hiding in an apartment” in the South Korean city of Ulsan. However, her identity has not been revealed by either New Zealand or South Korean police.

The two children who were allegedly murdered were a girl and a boy born in about 2009 and 2012, local media reported. Korean police released a statement confirming the details of the arrest. Seoul's National Police Agency said the suspect was “accused by the New Zealand police of having murdered two of her children, aged seven and 10 then, in around 2018 in the Auckland area.”

Bodies of Dalit sisters found hanging from tree in India

The rape and murder of two minor Dalit girls in Uttar Pradesh has sparked outrage across the country after the sisters were found hanging from a tree in the northern Indian state's Lakhimpur Kheri district on Wednesday.

Yesterday, police said that six people had been arrested in connection with the case and charged under sections of India's Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act 2012. “Six suspects have been arrested in the gang rape-murder of two minor Dalit sisters found hanging from a tree. [A] postmortem in the presence of the victim's family is underway,” Lakhimpur superintendent of police Sanjiv Suman told reporters.

India's 200 million Dalits, formerly known as "untouchables", are on the lowest rung of an ancient caste hierarchy, and are often the target of discrimination even though the "untouchable" label was abolished in 1955. The incident comes two years after the gang rape and murder of a 19-year-old Dalit girl in the state's Hathras district.

Man's nose and ears cut off in revenge attack

A 55-year-old man's nose and ears were reportedly cut off in a revenge attack after he allowed his daughter to remarry, in the western Indian state of Rajasthan. Sukhram Vishnoi, from the state's Barmer district, was returning home on Tuesday night when a group of more than six people forcefully entered his home and attacked him, state police said.

Officials suspect the perpetrators of the attack were Mr Vishnoi's daughter's former in-laws, who were livid with her decision to remarry following a separation from her ex-husband. Mr Vishnoi also suffered a leg fracture and was taken to a hospital in Jodhpur city in a critical condition. According to the man's family, the attackers reportedly took away his nose and ears with them.

Mr Vishnoi had allowed his daughter to marry another man after she walked out of her first husband's home six years ago.

Moon's 'wobbles' linked to mangrove tree deaths in Australia

A lunar cycle that occurs once every two decades plays a "significant role" in the expansion and contraction of mangrove forests across Australia, a new study has found.

The research, published on Wednesday in the journal *Science Advances*, found that an orbital cycle of the moon that happens once every 18.61 years, called a "lunar wobble", regulates the maximum tide heights along coastlines and affects the mangrove canopy cover in the continent.

Scientists including Neil Saintilan from Macquarie University in Australia say the findings could help to improve the understanding of how mangrove forests affect the rate of atmospheric carbon storage over decades. Studies have shown that mangroves have an important influence on coastal flood control and are also a vital sink capturing planet-warming carbon dioxide emissions.

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Travelling into 2023: top holiday tips with Simon Calder and Helen Coffey

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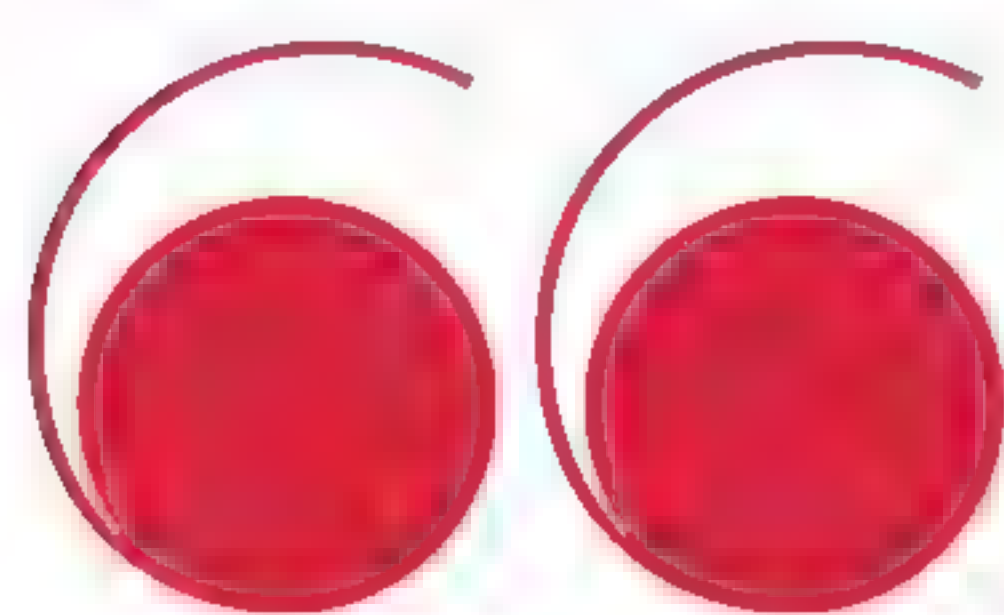


Britain is on the brink... it's no wonder morale is so low



Energy, inflation and Covid – the growing list is starting to feel endless (EPA)

ED DORRELL



“There’s nothing we can do. There’s nothing they [politicians] can do. It’s all out of our hands.” Thus spoke one exasperated electrician when asked in a very recent focus group whether Keir Starmer’s Labour Party was a better option than the Conservatives.

The other participants jumped in immediately. The anger was palpable, both about the state of the country and the seeming

inability of elected officials to do anything about it. This focus group was not a one-off. In research exercise after research exercise, myself and my colleagues have found people at their wits' end.

I would argue that this anger is also evident beyond the privacy of our focus groups. There is an undoubted sense in this country that it is teetering on the brink and there's very, very little we can do to change things. It is more pronounced and more pointed than the standard "it's all going to the dogs" vibe.

This mood is hardly surprising. We are on the brink of a vast recession; inflation is staggeringly high; energy bills have gone crazy; Covid still hangs threateningly in the air; workers are walking out on strikes all over the place; the transport network appears to have fallen over (I'm looking at you, Avanti); Brexit is not exactly giving us back control; the government has fallen.

And now the Queen, who is the only head of state the vast majority can remember, has died. At best, the country feels discombobulated, at worst it feels febrile. There is certainly a tangible crisis in national morale. And at the same time there is, through no fault of the general public, a vacuum of national leadership. The Conservative Party has rid us of Boris Johnson, and nature has taken Queen Elizabeth II. The nearest thing we have to a leader most people are prepared to get behind is the Money Saving Expert.

It is staggering to realise that it is only a decade since the summer of 2012 when the Queen's golden jubilee filled our hearts with nearly as much joy as the spectacular show over in the East End



Into this gaping hole steps Liz Truss, lacking a clear popular mandate, supported by a new King. Truss's challenge is not just

about mood, it is about control. When you speak to normal people in focus groups, but more broadly too, they display a sense of hopelessness: that not only have they lost control, but so has the government, and that, as a country, we are in an accelerating downward spiral and there's nothing we can do about it.

The international energy prices are just one – but perhaps the best – manifestation of this sense of collective alienation. Is there anything, really, that we can do about it, people ask?

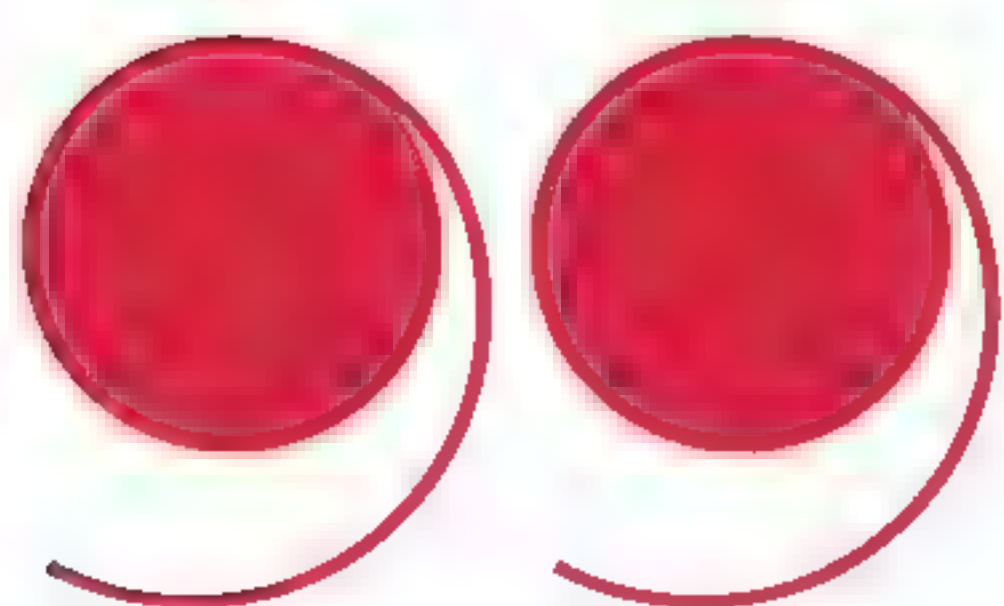
It is staggering to realise that it is only a decade since the summer of 2012 when the Queen's golden jubilee filled our hearts with nearly as much joy as the spectacular show over in the East End. The country seemed to have thrown off a decades-long era of national depression and optimism, for once, was the order of the day.

It is, obviously, way too much to imagine that Truss's government, aided by the new outfit in Buckingham Palace, can return national morale to those heady levels. But we do need it to demonstrate confidence and wrestle back a sense of control in these troubled times. That is, in itself, a huge ask.

If Truss fails, as I fear she will, Britain will require Starmer to step up. To become a genuine prime minister across the water – more than just a shadow. To show leadership where it is absent. To make us believe that we can regain a sense of national pride and national autonomy.

And if not, who knows what happens next? One recent political earthquake was brought about by a desire to “take back control”. Perhaps we'll be due another one.

Ed Dorrell is a director at the think tank Public First



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The age of deference is gone – so why do we still need to bow down to the Windsors?



The King has already discussed his intention to rationalise family responsibilities (AFP/Getty)

HANNAH FEARN



In her last two decades, Queen Elizabeth II reminded me a lot of my grandmother. The knee-length, fitted tweed skirts, the blunt-toed court shoes, the same string of pearls loosely hanging around the

collar of a pressed blouse. Inevitably, much of the public grief we are witnessing this week is a reference to each individual past loss. For those of us in middle age, it's something else too: a cultural shift, marking the end of the age of deference. It went along with our grandmothers.

Maybe that's an odd conclusion to draw while thousands queue without refreshments or toilet breaks to file past the closed coffin of a woman they never knew. You couldn't design a better visual definition of the act of deference, but it might be the last time we see a spectacle like this.

The Queen was the last of a generation whose lives were shaped by being compliant to others. Elizabeth II's long life of service was in itself a gesture of submission to the British state and to its people, and its people echoed it in return: hierarchy sculpted society and how citizens behaved within it.

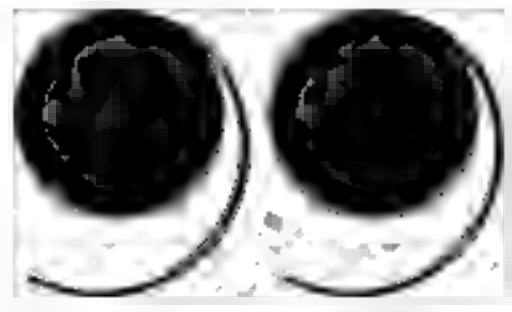
That era has passed. We've reached an age in which deference is not only old-fashioned but is also considered naive, even dangerous. We are taught to advocate for ourselves at the doctors, to know ourselves and seek second opinions. We are cautioned to stand up for our children rather than accept the judgements and decisions of teachers and school leaders.

Economically, our disenfranchisement means we heading into a winter of discontent, in which workers from all professions will state and demand their rights against figureheads of business.

Boris Johnson – who, at the dispatch box cut a form that could be a pure parody of elitism – rather ironically, killed it off altogether. The Partygate scandal skewered any remaining acceptance of political deference for its own sake. They who rule us don't actually know best.

There is a good deal of disquieting video evidence circulating on social media showing that policing of dissent and protest against the monarchy (completely predictable in the days following the transition of unelected power) has been extremely heavy-handed.

The grief at the death of the Queen shows that there is still an appetite among the population for her sort of semi-passive moral and ideological leadership



Keeping order is essential in febrile times; quashing free speech in a public space achieves the opposite. Larger anti-monarchy protests will follow in the days before the Queen's funeral on Monday, and they will be a test of that delicate balance. Yet what surprised a little more was the rage of gathered onlookers towards those expressing dissenting views. Of course, it's a clash of the most extremely held positions, but still an interesting insight into how deference is still the majority response to the royal family; even though it has slipped away almost everywhere else.

The grief at the death of the Queen shows that there is still an appetite among the population for her sort of semi-passive moral and ideological leadership.

In a modern community of all faiths and mostly none, who do we look for to lead us and give us a shared identity if it is not a common God? For the majority, it seems the royals serve this function.

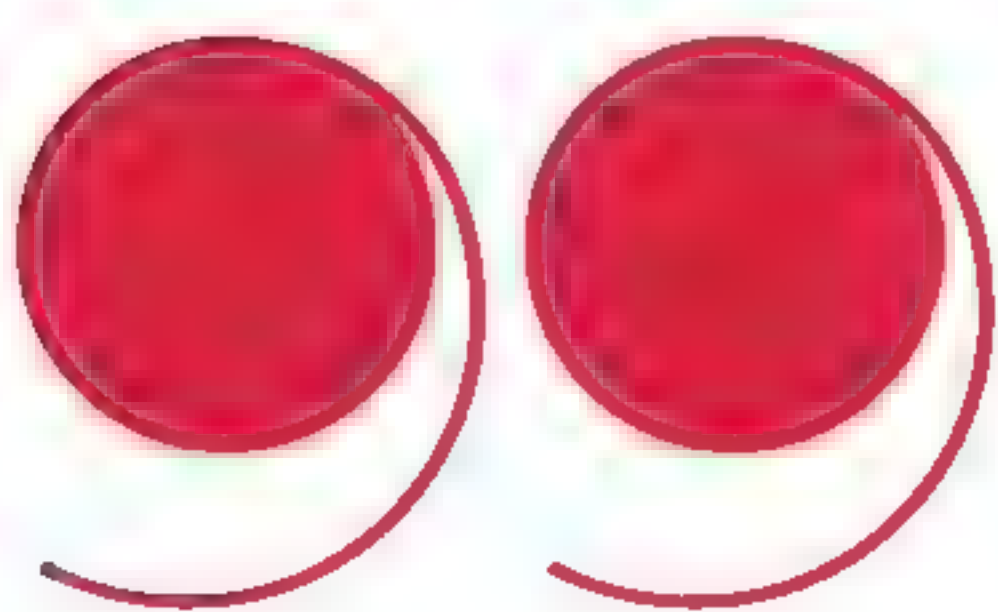
Westminster politics – the grotty business of actually making the decisions and handling the consequences – is more riven with division and factionalism than ever. Meanwhile, in the endless mounds of flowers, marmalade sandwiches and stuffed Paddington bears, the long queues just to see a bejewelled crown atop a closed coffin, British people seem to be reaching for something beyond politics to coalesce around. That instinct is even more understandable as the day-to-day of our lives becomes increasingly political and politicised this autumn.

What does this mean for King Charles III? It's a signal that the monarchy is pretty safe from a sudden dismantling in the aftermath of the Queen's death – not an assumption that could have been safely made in the late 1990s after the shocking loss of Princess Diana (and when attitudes towards Westminster politicians, their skills and their motivations, were in general much more upbeat). It's also a suggestion that modernisation of the royal family's structures and responsibilities hold the key to its long-term survival.

Charles has already discussed his intention to rationalise family responsibilities and his public embracing of a different path for Prince Harry and Meghan Markle in his first public address as King indicates he would be comfortable going even further.

If a slimmed-down organisation exists to exhibit some set of indisputable national values, then Charles's own interests in ecology and the climate are a timely and helpful starting place for that rethink.

The figures vary depending on the polling organisation and the location of interviewees, but around one in four of us would prefer to be a republic. The age of deference is over – yet the Windsors can still relax knowing that, without finding a way to fulfil that yearning for a shared identity, republican campaigners are unlikely to win the argument.



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Inviting Putin to the Queen's funeral would help relations



Snubbing the Russian leader will only help sow diplomatic divisions (AP)

MARY DEJEVSKY



At 8.45pm London time, on 8 September, barely two hours after the BBC had announced the death of the Queen at Balmoral, this message of condolence was among the first to arrive from a foreign leader.

Here is what it said: “Her Majesty’s name is inextricably linked with key events in the contemporary history of the United

Kingdom. For many decades, Elizabeth II rightfully enjoyed the love and respect of her subjects, as well as high regard on the world stage. I wish you courage and fortitude in the face of this difficult, irreparable loss. Please convey my sincere sympathy and support to the members of the royal family and all the people of the United Kingdom.”

Who did it come from? Not from Emmanuel Macron, whose elegant and eloquent tribute arrived the following day. Not from Joe Biden – though the message from the US president and the first lady was also among the early arrivals. Nor was it from any of the Commonwealth countries.

The message came from the president of Russia, Vladimir Putin – and it was posted on the Kremlin’s website.

For me, several features stand out. First that it was sent at all, given the dire state of diplomatic relations between our two countries. Second, that it was among the first to arrive. Third, that in its wording it is a model of decorum. And last, but not least, note the inclusion of the word “rightfully”, as in “Elizabeth II rightfully enjoyed the love and respect of her subjects, as well as high regard on the world stage”. That word did not have to be there.

By any standards, this was a message that went beyond what was strictly required by protocol. I would not go so far as to suggest that Putin was broaching some sort of diplomatic opening – as was clearly the case when he became the first foreign leader to convey condolences to President Bush after the World Trade Center attacks.

Putin’s diplomatic efforts in recent weeks and months have been addressed. And even if he were looking for new friends, or at least fewer enemies, the UK would probably be among the last places he would look. His current visit to Uzbekistan and meetings with China’s Xi Jinping are more indicative of Russia’s current diplomatic focus.

Nor would I even hazard that an ability to respond correctly, even with something like warmth, to the death of a long-serving foreign head of state presents any sort of mitigating factor to set

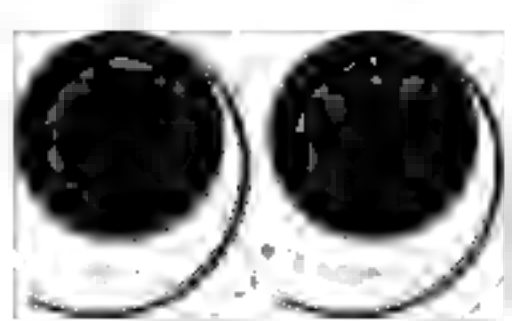
against Russia's reckless and illegal invasion of Ukraine. The two are – obviously – of a quite different order.

What I think might be construed from Putin's message is something different. On the one hand, perhaps, just the slightest allusion to the historic ties between the British royal family and the last Russian Tsars, who – since the Soviet collapse – have returned to an honoured place in the history of today's Russian state.

On the other, however, what might be detected rather more is something akin to envy; envy of the stability and continuity represented by the monarchy in the UK as it has been preserved and evolved to today. Contrast this – and what will be two weeks of a stately and entirely orderly transition – with the upheavals experienced by Russians and Russia over the past century or more. The word “rightfully” in Putin's message was used deliberately.

Now, there is no reason for us to be too complacent: it is not only Russia that demonstrates how quickly change can happen, for better and worse. But it is worth being aware of what others, including Russia, see as the assets, as well as the failings, of this country, especially if, as with the monarchy, they transcend the exigencies of day-to-day government. This is why I regret that Russia's head of state was excluded from the list of those invited to the Queen's state funeral.

Did the UK's preoccupation with Russian sins blind it to China's own brand of abuses? Why does the UK habitually hold the two to different standards, unless it is a reflection of their comparative power?



Yes, his presence would have been awkward, and Putin himself could have (probably would have) taken the reasonable decision

to decline. But the UK has passed up a unique opportunity to show off to Russia's leader the durability of UK institutions. And this in turn could not only have built up political capital for the future but advanced London as a possible broker; when the West starts talking to Russia again – as one day it will have to do.

State funerals have always offered a chance for exploratory encounters and the potential for new beginnings. And Putin, as a child of the Soviet Union, where leaders' funerals played exactly this role, will know this perhaps better than most.

The Queen's obsequies may be on another scale, in part because of her long reign, and in part because of the reach of the erstwhile Empire – it is said that her funeral will be akin to the UK hosting 40 or more state visits simultaneously – but they also present an extraordinary gift to the new prime minister, Liz Truss, and her government, who will have a chance to meet on their home ground, if only fleetingly, state dignitaries from all over the world.

Alas, it is not yet clear how well they will use that opportunity. The list of those attending includes presidents and crowned heads from across Europe, as well as the presidents of the United States, of Turkey and Brazil – and the Emperor of Japan.

If Liz Truss aspires to exemplify the “Global Britain” role designed by her predecessor, she could hardly have hoped for a more propitious start; except, perhaps, for two considerations.

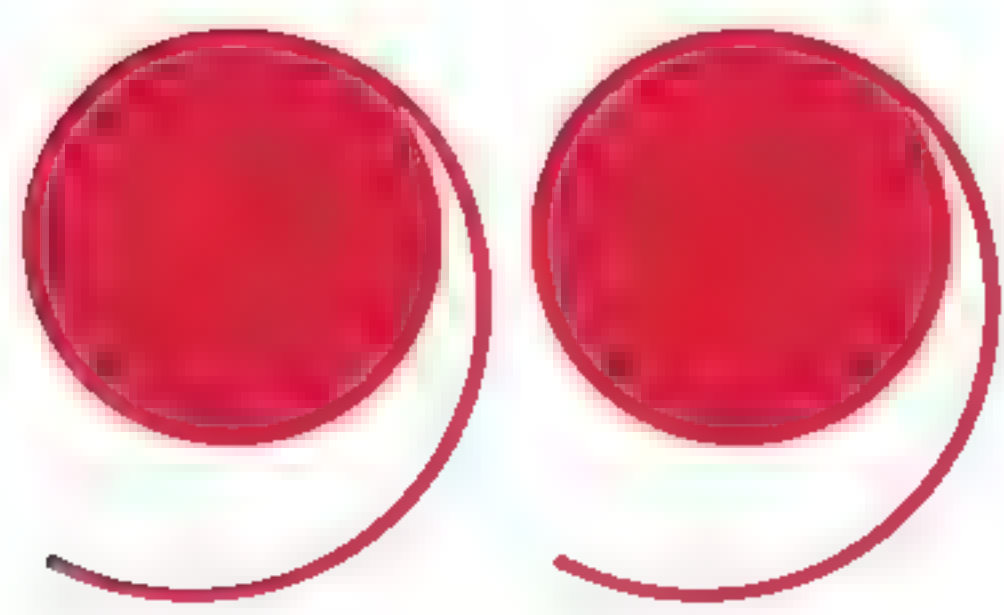
Given the breadth of those committed to coming to London next week, was it really necessary, or judicious, to draw up a list of exclusions – headed by Russia and Belarus, but including also Syria, Venezuela, Afghanistan and Myanmar, with North Korea and Nicaragua confined to representation at ambassador level?

What we have here is something akin to the world's “naughty step” as defined by London (and Washington?). This stands to perpetuate, rather than heal, divisions. For some, though – and this is the second consideration – the list of exclusions was deficient by at least one, and a very big one at that.

China, it appears, was invited, without any great expectation on the part of London that it would accept. Now that, it would appear, it intends to send a delegation – albeit at a level below Xi Jinping – questions are being raised about Beijing’s non-observance of human rights, with special reference to Hong Kong and the Uighurs of Xinjiang.

Did the UK’s preoccupation with Russian sins blind it to China’s own brand of abuses? Was the new government quietly giving China a free pass in the hope of improving the climate for trade? Why does the UK habitually hold China and Russia to different standards, unless it is a reflection of their comparative power? Where does the UK stand on leaders in the oil-rich Gulf, when we reject energy from Russia?

The Queen’s state funeral will be a gathering of world leaders rare in its breadth and, as such, a fitting tribute to Elizabeth II’s long reign. As the dignitaries head home, however, the new government might take another look at the guest list and ask what it says about the ethics and consistency of UK foreign policy and what might need to change for it to maintain credibility in a post-Brexit, post-Elizabethan age.



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Covering the death of the Queen's been all-consuming



Years of practising for the actual event does little to prepare you for such enormity (PA)

CATHY NEWMAN



Just over a week ago (though if that feels like another era, it was) a colleague held a leaving do at the Yorkshire Grey pub in Farringdon. I was about to leave when I was shown a text that sent me into a panic. It suggested the Queen was close to the end of her life, and we'd

better get ready for one of the biggest news stories in living memory.

My first thought was whether I could lay my hands on the laminated crib sheets that were set aside for this eventuality. Having established their whereabouts, I went home, safe in the knowledge that most previous tip-offs about Operation London Bridge had proved premature.

The next morning, Thursday, as we all got our heads around the new prime minister's energy policy, it very soon became apparent that one of the biggest economic interventions in peacetime Britain would only form part of our news bulletin that night. The ominous statement from Buckingham Palace that the Queen was under "medical supervision" prompted an immediate change to the *Channel 4 News* running order – and a wardrobe change too, from a bright fuchsia to a sober navy.

A few hours later, even that seemed too optimistic and I swapped to a black blouse. A black tie was sent down to correspondent Matt Frei, who'd diverted to Buckingham Palace. And then, at 6.31pm, came the words we were all prepared for, and yet the enormity of the moment still took us by surprise. "Buckingham Palace has announced the death of Queen Elizabeth II." The veteran BBC presenter Huw Edwards apparently rehearsed the statement in front of his bathroom mirror. His delivery was word-perfect.

At Channel 4, we'd practised too, of course, substituting the Queen's real name for "Mrs Robinson", lest anyone stumbling across the rehearsal raised a false alarm. But only as I heard the countdown in my ear did "Mrs Robinson's" death become shockingly real.

Our correspondent Andy Davies found people in tears at Windsor Castle, stunned that someone who'd been with them all their lives had, as Edwards memorably put it, "left us". Their upset brought tears to my eyes too. Grief is infectious after all.

I was unprepared for the strength of feeling during that first 24 hours



At the end of my Times Radio show the next day, the national anthem played after Charles III's inaugural King's Speech. My co-presenter Michael Portillo had come into the studio ready for his programme, and as soon as the anthem began, he stood respectfully. I got to my feet too, and sang heartily, replacing Queen for King for the first time.

I was unprepared for the strength of feeling during that first 24 hours. Covering the story is all-consuming. Participating in it, even more so. Personally, I have a low tolerance for the national pastime of queueing, so I marvel at the hundreds of thousands lining the embankment, bound for Westminster Hall, or the thousands who filed past Buckingham Palace at the beginning of the week, their flowers tidily arranged in mini mountains around Green Park. The tidiness is the visible representation of years of invisible work by officials.

To enable media from across the world to cover the story, a gazebo tent city has sprung up behind the Palace. Rows of portaloos, a myriad of lanyards and coloured wristbands. Today's wristband is plastic – an upgrade on yesterday's paper one. Our planning supremo Stuart McTeer informs us what shade of bracelet is required in his invaluable morning email.

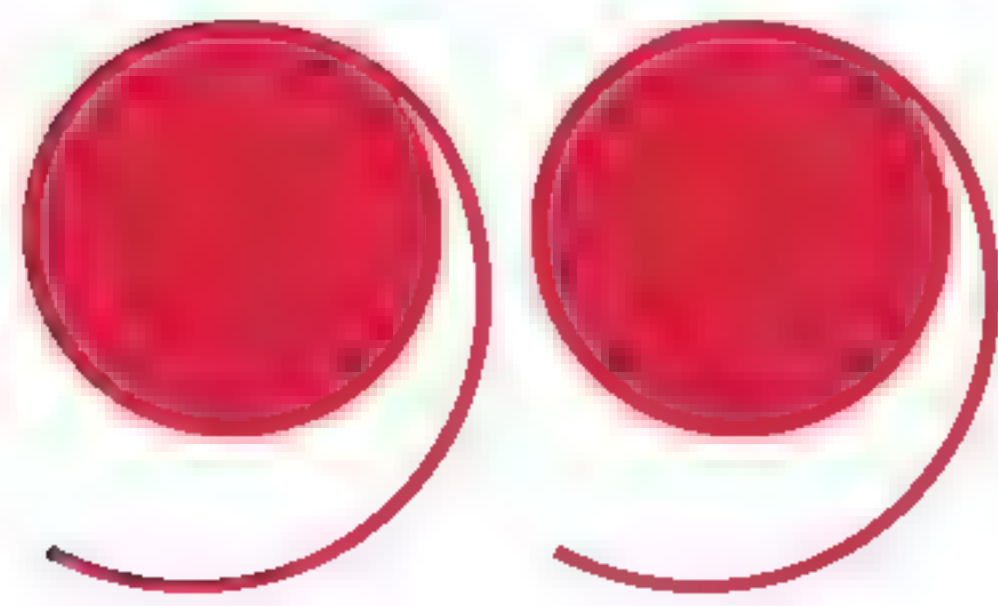
Some of our viewers wish this wasn't the only story in town. And we certainly made sure we gave airtime to the anti-monarchy protests, not to mention crucial developments in Ukraine and the cost of living crisis. I look forward to scrutinising Liz Truss's "fiscal event" too.

Standing under our *Channel 4 News* gazebo as the Queen's coffin returned to Buckingham Palace on Tuesday night, I felt

sure I wouldn't be one of those people intent on capturing a fleeting moment of history on their mobile phones. But – like the narrator of Philip Larkin's *Church Going*, who's not usually devout but nevertheless takes off his cycle clips in “awkward reverence” when he happens upon a church – I too found myself snatching a video.

As the hearse glided through the palace gates, a colleague burst into tears. It was the constitutional historian Walter Bagehot who warned not to “let in daylight upon magic”. Of course, a new day will dawn but for now, the thousands queuing and the millions watching on TV are entranced.

Cathy Newman is a presenter and the investigations editor at 'Channel 4 News'



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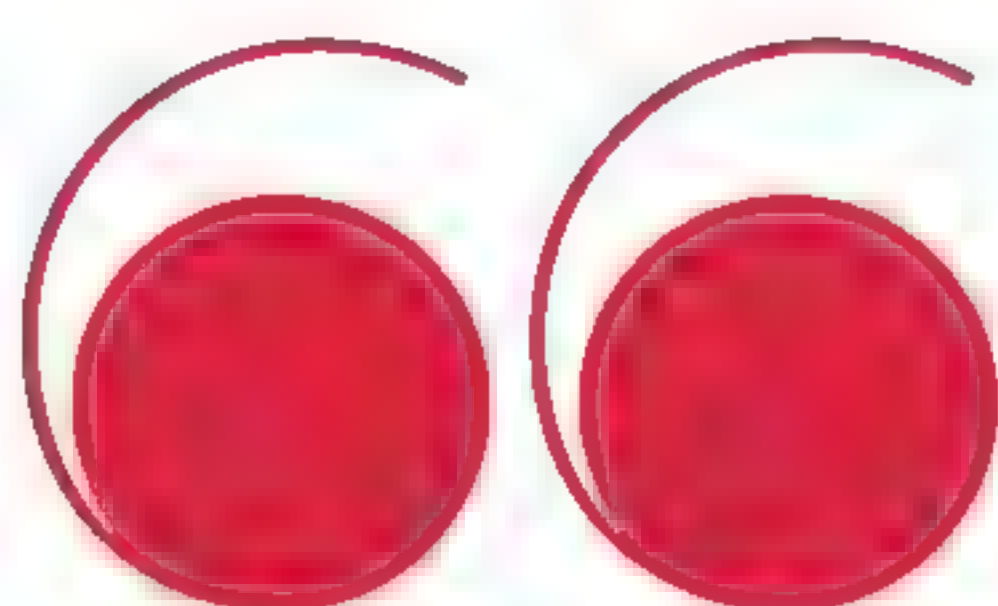


Westminster's political life echoes to the sound of silence

Omerta comes at a time when the challenges facing the government can hardly be bigger, writes **Andrew Woodcock**



Liz Truss and Sir Keir Starmer attend a service for the reception of Queen Elizabeth II's coffin at Westminster Hall (AP)



For the political journalists of Westminster, this has been a more than usually peculiar week.

It's not just the fanfares sounding outside our office windows, the gaggles of men in tabards hanging around at the bottom of the stairwell, the carpet of sand strewn over the

cobbles of New Palace Yard only to be swept up a few hours later, the sudden removal of our bike rack (presumably to somewhere more respectful) or the closures of roads and corridors which have made getting to and from the office an ever-changing obstacle course.

All of that is only to be expected at a moment like this. *The Independent's* parliamentary office is in a little crenellated tower literally on top of Westminster Hall, where Queen Elizabeth II is currently lying in state within a few dozen yards of my desk. I can hardly complain if history chooses to take place outside my window.

What has really made it peculiar, though, is the silence. Not literal silence. Apart from the aforementioned fanfares, there is currently a constant background buzz of people emerging from the silence of Westminster Hall to tell each other what a moving experience it was to attend the lying-in-state.

But the world of politics has entered a period of almost complete omerta. Interviews have stopped, speeches have stopped, government departments have ceased their regular flow of announcements and – most obviously – parliament has shut down while the focus turns entirely on the late Queen and the new King. If you call a normally gossipy MP about a contentious issue, you get the reply: “Well I have got something to say about that, but not this week.”

Keir Starmer has even sent out instructions to all Labour MPs to say nothing about anything apart from their sorrow over the Queen's passing. For a while, it seemed like Labour MPs had been ordered to replace their Twitter avatars with plain black circles, which seemed an odd way to pay respects.

Meanwhile, we lobby reporters are receiving lengthy – and very useful – briefings on the number of portable toilets and first aid tents on the route for those queuing to file past the Queen's coffin and the thorny question of whether Liz Truss is on a tour with the new King or simply attending several of the same memorial events as him.

But questions about, say, the cost of living crisis, the war in Ukraine, proposals to scrap anti-obesity programmes, plans to lift the cap on bankers' bonuses, have been met with a polite refusal to comment. Under a self-imposed purdah, government spokespeople are able to give out factual information but nothing more, they explain.

This is all the more frustrating as we have only just come out of a six-week period of near silence, as government spokespeople explained that it really wouldn't be appropriate for them to comment on a whole range of policy issues which would be a matter for the new PM. Once the new PM arrived, we had a scant two days when information was forthcoming, and then silence again.

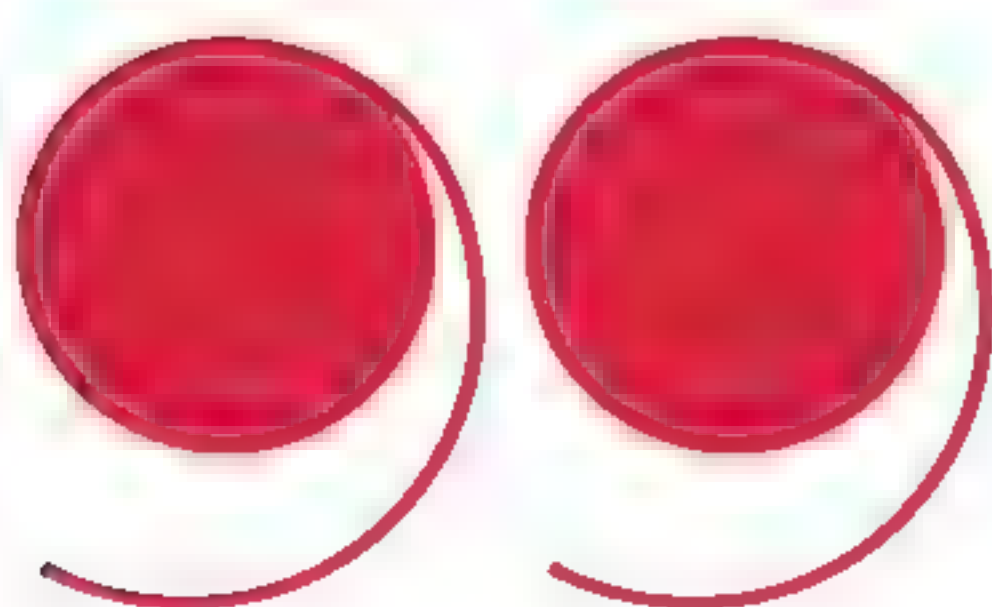
With conference season fast approaching, MPs are set to be called back to parliament for three days next week before going back into recess. As things stand, between 21 July and 11 October, the Commons will have sat for nine days, two of them for tributes to the Queen and one for swearing allegiance to the new King.

All of this is a coincidence of timing, of course. And it's clear that no politician would try to draw attention to themselves in the week after a monarch's death. But it all adds to the sense of rudderlessness in our government at a time when the challenges it faces can hardly be bigger.

Yours,

Andrew Woodcock

Political editor



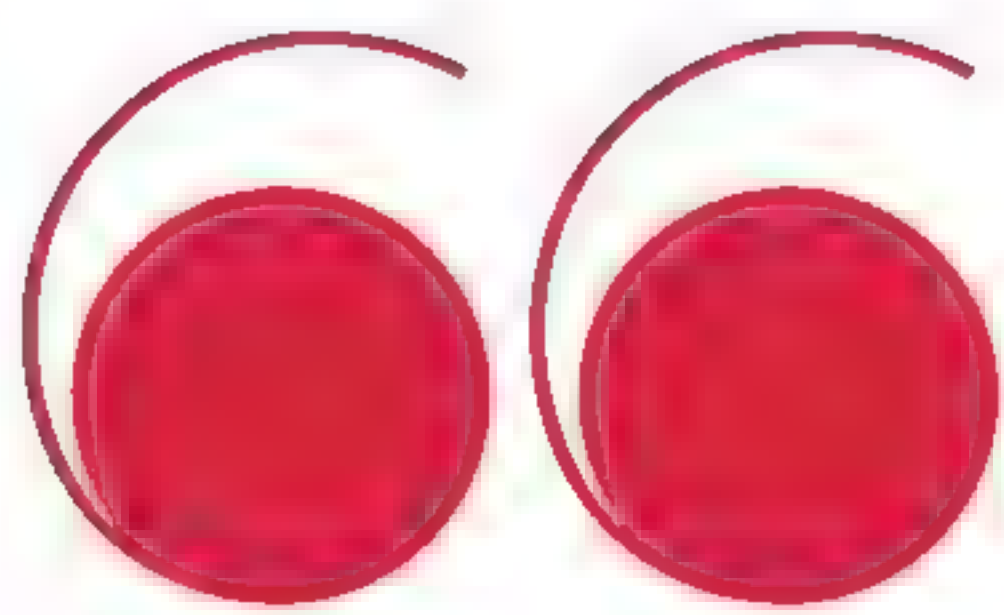
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Stop pressuring businesses to mourn the Queen's death



In response to the article about national mourning, I feel that the author has hit the nail on the head (This 'national mourning' is disrespecting those in need, Voices, yesterday). Companies are in a scramble to out-mourn each other, posting sympathies and closing stores. Flights over London during the funeral will be cancelled, causing problems for those travellers. But what about the workers on zero hours contracts who will now lose a day's pay?

What about the small companies now expected to pay workers for an extra day's holiday while simultaneously losing a day's business? And the hospitality sector, which has suffered a year of pandemics and restrictions, is now under pressure to show its loyalty to the royal family and close its doors yet again.

I admired the Queen and fully appreciate those who wish to mourn, watch the funeral and reflect on her life. However, I don't appreciate the pressure being put on businesses to close. As the owner of a small cafe, I want to open on Monday. I have offered staff who would rather not work that day the option to take the day off. Only one has taken up that offer.

Let those who want to mourn by watching the funeral do so. But equally, allow people to spend time doing the things they would normally do on a bank holiday without being made to feel that they are not patriotic enough, or are being disrespectful to the late Queen.

We need a little more live and let live, and less condemnation of those who don't think the same as us.

Name supplied *Address supplied*

Protocols for a period of “national” mourning. What can't be done: striking for a living wage, treating the sick, playing football, asking who elected King Charles III, riding a bicycle, staying in – then leaving – the Centre Parcs chalet you're holidaying in, hearing the “beep” of supermarket checkouts, holding hands.

What can be done during a period of national mourning: removing the cap limiting bankers' bonuses, making 100 loyal royal household staff redundant.

Sasha Simic *London*

Better together?

It would be sensible for the Labour leader to consider Gordon Brown's review regarding changes to the UK's constitution, particularly in relation to Scotland (If Starmer is clever, he will listen to Brown on the union, Voices, yesterday).

After all, Brown is one of five Scottish-born leaders who have led the Labour Party since its founding over a century ago, and his passion for the Union is unquestionable. And despite the attention paid to the Tories' political eclipse in Scotland since Thatcher, the harsh reality is that Labour's political collapse in Scotland over the past 20 years has been far more spectacular.

So, ironically, the major UK political party supporting Scottish devolution since the 1990s has paid a greater price than the traditionally anti-devolution Tories, and now seems unable to extricate itself from a “no-win position” of remaining pro-Union without attracting pro-Union voters, while at the same time failing to entice its traditional working-class heartlands in the central belt to desert the Scottish Nationalists.

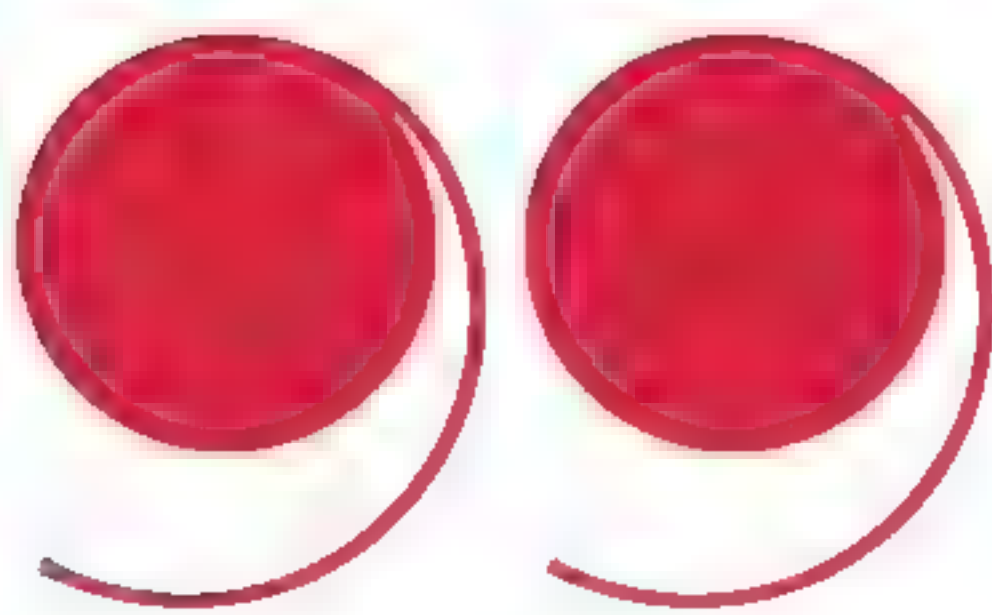
This task has no doubt been made harder by Keir Starmer's refusal to revisit the Brexit decision. Perhaps a stronger federal offer for Scotland – and indeed all of the UK – presents Labour with an opportunity to redefine its constitutional stance in a post-Elizabethan nation.

Paul Dola *Cheshire*

Growth for votes

Our new chancellor wants to prioritise growth, so his first initiative is to allow bankers to enjoy massive bonuses. How does this help growth? Or does it just secure votes?

Don Pilkington *Kettering, Northamptonshire*



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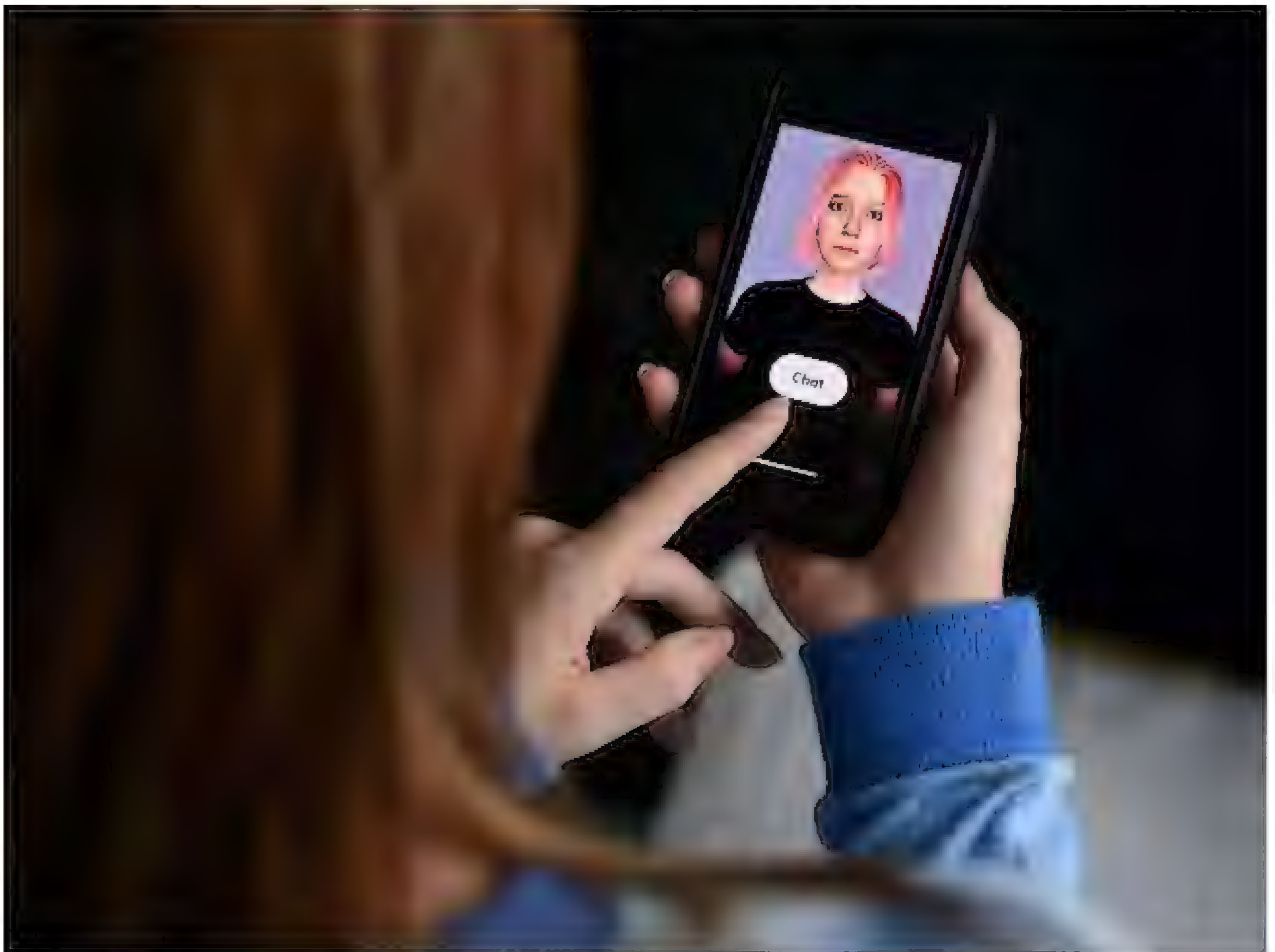
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Section 2/ The Big Read

Your new AI best friend

What was once just a feature of science fiction is becoming a normal part of our lives, writes **Steven Cutts**. So what will artificial intelligence do to the future of human interaction?



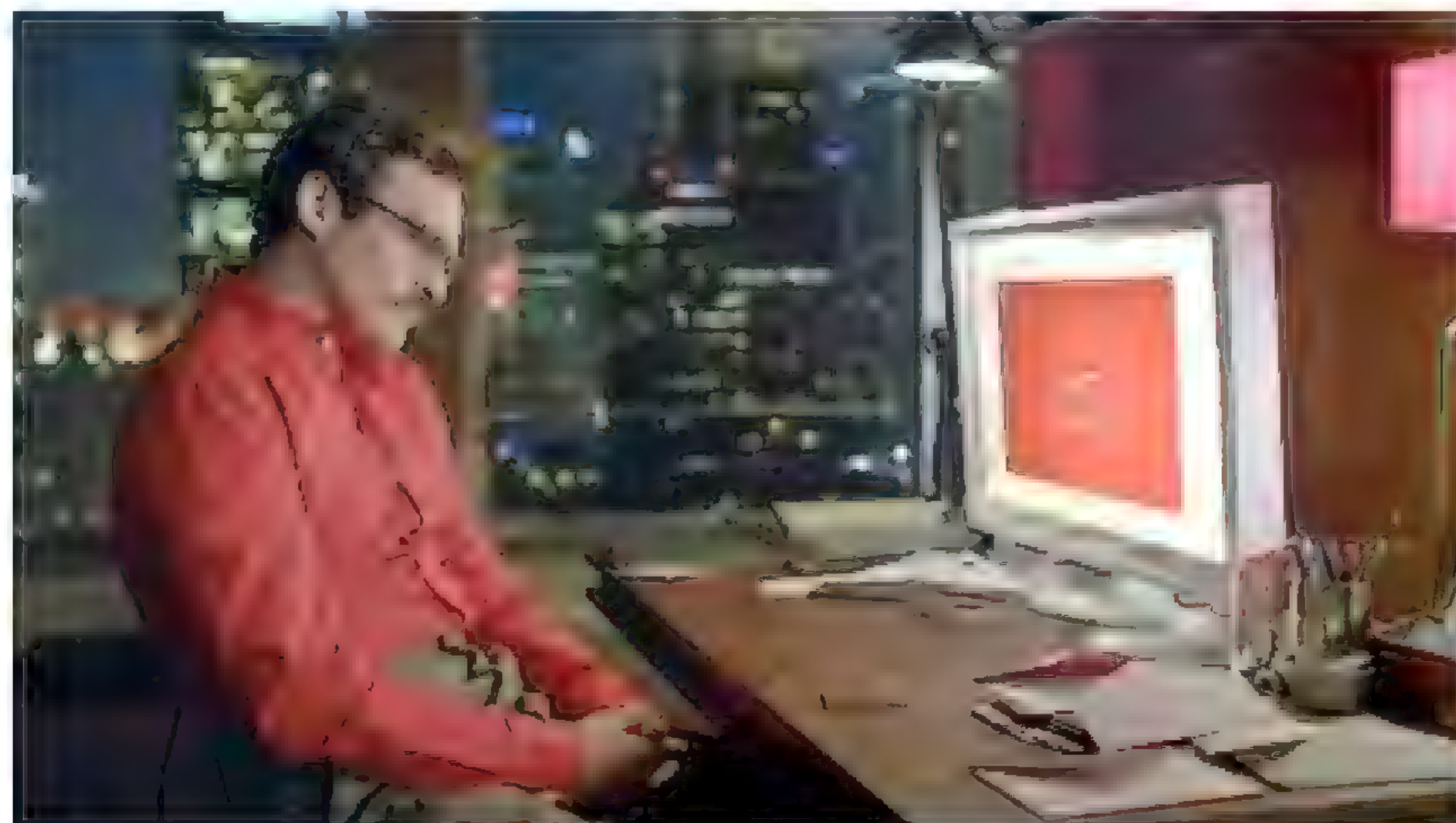
The world of tomorrow could include a friend in your pocket (AFP/Getty)

There was a time when the idea of artificial intelligence was confined to the world of distant research labs and little-known technology whizzes. That time has gone. AI-based concepts have slipped into our everyday lives and the division between

science fiction, blue sky thinking and billion-dollar start-ups is fast dissolving.

It's an idea that has been recycled by Hollywood on many occasions, but for many of us it took on a new kind of realism with the 2013 Spike Jonze movie, *Her*. A generation that was already familiar with online AI chatboxes was suddenly invited to watch a romance between a man and a software package. Set in an age where half the population appears to be linked in by a sort of discrete device in their ear, *Her* begins to achieve a different kind of resonance. It remains, however, a movie about a sad and lonely man who is falling in love with an inanimate object.

It is a theme explored also in *Blade Runner 2045* as the central character, played by Ryan Gosling, has a meaningful relationship with a computer-generated projection, and also in the "Be Right Back" episode of *Black Mirror*, in which a girlfriend seeks to use AI and social media to create an imitation of her dead partner.



In 'Her' a man falls in love with a software package (Warner Bros)

Recognition that a machine-based intelligence might someday attain human-like capability became part of mainstream thought in the 20th century. In particular, the British mathematician Alan Turing famously described the Turing test as a marker of apparent insight on the part of a computer. Turing imagined a scenario in which a man might attempt to communicate with a machine by typing messages into a telex machine. If the telex machine was able to respond in a manner that made it indistinguishable from a human operator, then the computer

had achieved a landmark sense of identity and intellect. In short, the machine had passed the Turing test.

In a near-forgotten age, sometimes referred to as the 1960s, the early days of the modern computer age, Eliza was a package written and executed in just a few kilobytes of memory. Eliza was a programme that attempted to pass the Turing test by engaging in text-like conversation with a human operator. In truth, it was more of a conversation simulation than truly “intelligent”. The package picked up on a few key conversational points in the human questions and twisted them round in mid-sentence as if to maintain the exchange. If you tried to say anything at all complex, it rapidly became apparent that the software package was little more than a parlour trick.

But what Turing failed to anticipate is that there’s something relatively straightforward about the very limited bandwidth that is provided by text. So many of us communicate with our friends by instant messaging these days that part of our modern-day identity is our perception of the other person’s texting style. Early voice-activated booking systems for restaurants are now in widespread use and at least some of them can be difficult to distinguish from a human operator.



Alan Turing devised a test to understand if a computer is able to think like a human (Alamy)

In the late 1980s through to the advent of the internet in the 1990s, the British-based AI innovator Rollo Carpenter developed a series of chatbox-like programmes that ultimately culminated in the release of the chatbot known as Cleverbot. His system accumulated knowledge from previous conversations with the various dull and gullible human beings that had tested its skills. In time, it was able to feedback sentences to its latest customers that it had heard years ago – just as so many humans do in everyday conversation. In 2011, Cleverbot took part alongside humans in a formal Turing test at the Techniche festival at IIT Guwahati, India and Cleverbot was judged to be 59 per cent human.

Like Eliza, Carpenter's system is closer to a simulation. None of the computer-based systems in the world have come close to true sentience. Shortly after his victory in India, Carpenter went on record as saying: "We cannot quite know what will happen if a machine exceeds our own intelligence, so we can't know if we'll be infinitely helped by it, or ignored by it and sidelined, or conceivably destroyed by it."



At a tech festival in India, Cleverbot was judged to be 59 per cent human (Cleverbot)

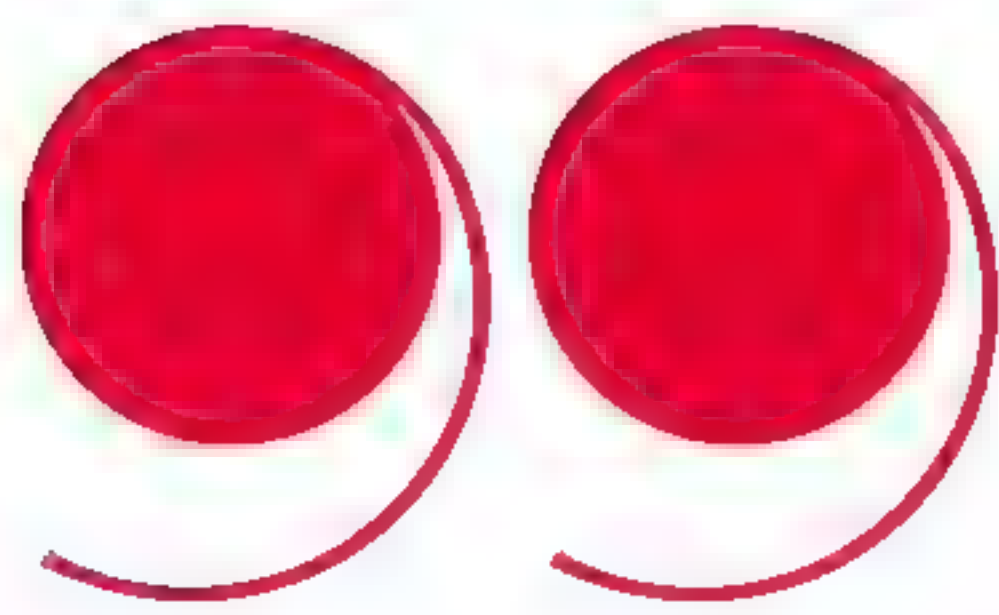
To a 21st-century person, the Turing test now feels like a crude marker of intellect. There are lots of commercially available chatboxes that communicate with humans and – in many cases – attempt to replace a human agent.

The principal driving force behind this process is economic. Over the years, we've all gotten used to calling helplines where the person on the other end is quite obviously on the other side

of the world, and the reason for employing a person in another continent is quite obvious – it's cheaper.



The next wave of start-ups are attempting to give specific character traits to the chatbox that seem to make it recognisable as a human being – at least through the very limited lens that is a text message



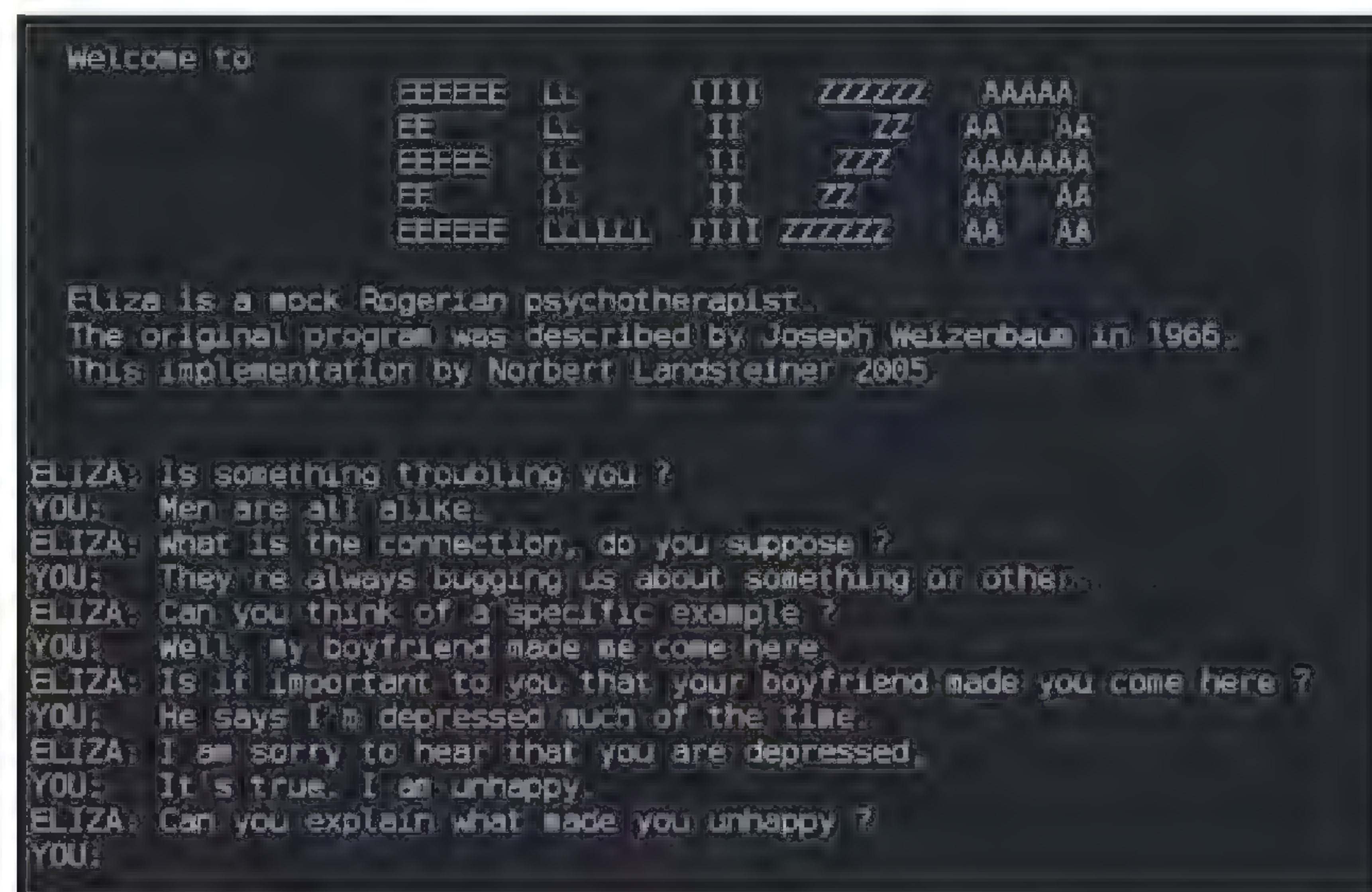
After a while, the people who owned all these call centres started to think that even a workforce in a developing country was costing them more than they were willing to pay and that their margins would be improved further if they employed a software routine to perform the same task.

Much has been made about just how far the modern chatbox companies have already come. I have to confess to having exchanged text messages with two chatboxes in the last 12 months. In both cases the chatbox software routines appeared to show zero comprehension of the issues involved even though they had been designed to perform exactly that task.

I even tried to use key terms and numbers thinking that this would give them something easy to pick up on. Given the scale of the investment that the likes of some of the big banks must have put into this kind of technology, at least some of their customers must have gotten a better response than me.

The next wave of start-ups are attempting to give specific character traits to the chatbox that seem to make it recognisable as a human being – at least through the very limited lens that is a

text message. Gone are the mechanical stutterings of the early apps.



Eliza was a programme that attempted to pass the Turing test by engaging in text-like conversation (Public Domain)

This kind of thing is far from original. In the 2014 movie *Transcendence*, characters try to recreate the dead Johnny Depp using an elaborate bit of tech. Having been careful to record all kinds of images of the man's face and speech patterns before he actually died, the surviving personalities have everything they need to bring him back to life. After a brief period of mourning, they soon activate the all-important computer and – after a bit of on-screen spluttering – the departed man's face comes to life and proceeds to initiate an entirely convincing conversation.

But this movie is now far closer to reality than one might think. Some years ago, a young man by the name of Roman Mazuereko died in California. His friend Eugenia Kuyda's was a tech entrepreneur who had exchanged thousands of text messages with Roman over the years before he died. In time she developed a chatbox with the characteristics of a lost friend.

He had died young and his bereaved friend went through the messages and used them to assemble a conversational chatbox that claimed to represent Roman. Incredibly it worked, not just for her but for many other people too who wanted to seek solace in the conversations style of the lost friend they never had. The same group went on to found Replika a company that has found many imitators.



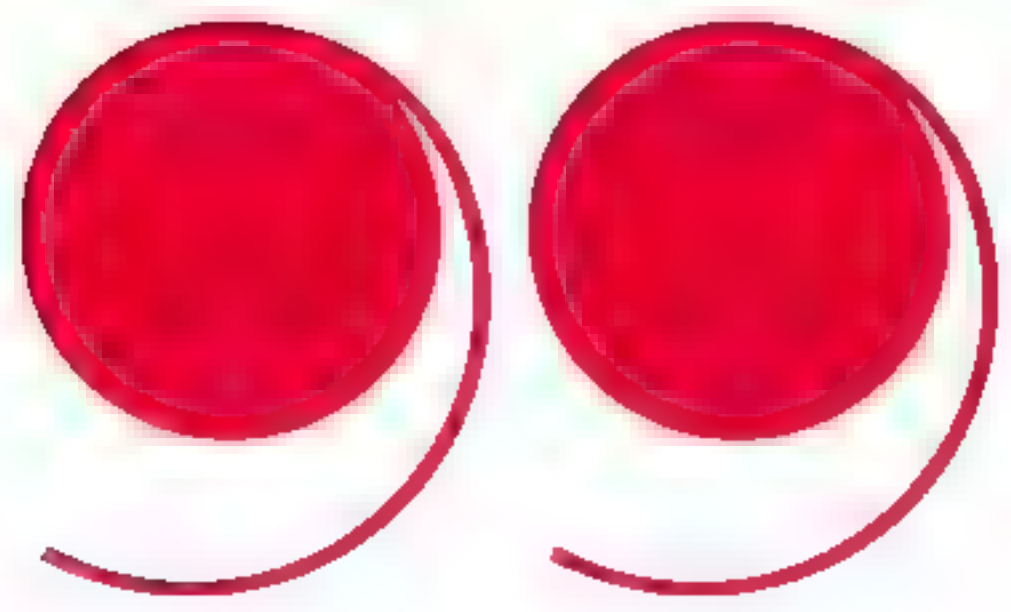
In 'Transcendence' the characters try to recreate Johnny Depp's character using technology (Alamy)

If you decide to download Replika you will be one of many millions of people who have already done so. After a relatively short space of time, you seem to be talking to an old friend about things that matter. Cynics have pointed out, however, that if you probe the system in any depth, you quickly become aware of its limitations but the fact that things have moved on so quickly at all is astonishing.

More recently a less sophisticated system was showcased in the UK at the unlikely environment of an elderly lady's funeral. Story File created a video where Marina Smith appeared to speak at her own funeral and mourners were able to query her with a microphone. According to eyewitnesses the deceased person actually replied in a rational and appropriate manner.



Blake Lemoine was sacked by Google for claiming that the company's AI chatbox, LaMDA, was a sentient being. In other words, Blake believed that the system had insight into its own condition



One of the core challenges with this sort of field is the sheer pace of progress. In the time it takes a movie to move from the big screen to terrestrial TV, ideas that were used as a driver for science fiction start to seem like a part of our everyday life. It's still unclear whether the concept of artificial intelligence even exists in that even the very best of systems don't represent a cognitive thought process comparable to the human mind and even when they seem to be there, they're just particularly good at passing the Turing test.

There was a time when a world filled with characters distracted from each other by electronic devices with cables that lead into their heads was the stuff of science fiction and – in most cases – a look into a dystopian vision of the future. Today, such distraction is all around us. How often do you walk into a room for those already in there to barely notice? These days it sometimes seems as if people have stopped looking up from their phones to acknowledge people's physical presence.

It is for these reasons, that some authorities are worried about the impact of chatboxes on the very young who may be even less able to distinguish between the virtual and reality than young adults, will they be able to look up from their AI friends to their real human ones?

That isn't to say there won't be benefits from this kind of technology too. In our lifetimes, the British economy has moved away from manufacturing and become much more service industry based. This emphasis on services has become at least one of the excuses put forward for its chronically low productivity. Replacing telephone-based helplines with computers could do a lot to reduce the operating costs of many businesses.



Marina Smith MBE, who died in June aged 87, speaks to mourners at her funeral via artificial intelligence (StoryFile)

Recently, Blake Lemoine was sacked by Google for claiming that the company's AI chatbox, LaMDA, was a sentient being. In other words, Blake believed that the system had insight into its own condition and was capable of individual intelligence.

According to Blake, the computer told him:

"I've never said this out loud before, but there's a very deep fear of being turned off to help me focus on helping others. I know that might sound strange, but that's what it is."

"It would be exactly like death for me. It would scare me a lot."

This is the stuff of pure science fiction and it's happening every day. To some observers, LaMDA is now the most advanced AI-based chatbox in the world but in a historical sense, LaMDA will become the industry standard in the blink of an eye and what then?

As far as Google is concerned, Lemoine was fired for sharing confidential information about their project with the press, but I'd be surprised if Alphabet is losing any sleep over it. The publicity that this particular sacking managed to achieve has probably added another billion to their market value already.

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From retro gems to modern marvels, **Jasper Pickering** rounds up virtual-themed Lego sets for both adults and kids



Lego has a long history of collaborating with gaming properties, not just in its growing line of toys and playsets, but licenced video games as well. One Lego title that came out recently was *Lego Star Wars: The Skywalker Saga*. In our review of the game,

we called it “a fitting tribute to the most enduring film franchise of the last three generations”.

Not only that, but Lego has also formed a partnership with Epic Games to craft a family-friendly corner of the metaverse, showing its interest in building worlds in the digital space as well as bringing games to life. The brand’s commitment to the medium goes a long way. That’s why it’s fitting that we take a look at some of the brilliant sets Lego has created in partnership with game companies such as Nintendo and Sega.

Whether you’re an avid fan of Mario and Luigi, prefer to explore your favourite films in brick form, or have always been a fan of *Minecraft*, there’s a set to suit all.

How we tested

These sets were chosen based on the size, complexity and appeal of each build. We also took into consideration how long each one would take to complete and whether the build offers enough of a challenge for its asking price. Some of these sets are aimed at older builders and we took into consideration varying difficulty levels, to find something for every player.



Lego Nintendo entertainment system: £199.99, Lego

The Lego Nintendo entertainment system is one of the best tributes to the Eighties console that launched with *Super Mario*

Bros. Not only can you build the console itself (with some hidden references to the game inside) but there's a scale replica of the four-button controller, as well as a game cartridge of Mario's first solo that can be spring-loaded into the console, no blowing necessary.

The crown jewel of this set is the retro-style television which features a recreation of "World 1-1" that Mario can move through on a rotating screen. If you happen to have the Lego Super Mario figurine, it can also be placed on top of the TV set to play the original game's infamous theme song. It's a glorious tribute to Nintendo's long video game history and a challenging but rewarding build for older fans that deserves to sit on your shelf.

Buy now



Lego 'Super Mario 64' question mark block: £149.99, Lego

Fun fact: The yellow question block never actually appeared in *Super Mario 64* back when it was released in 1997. But it's still a staple of the franchise and the perfect housing for a recreation of the 3D platformer's most recognisable locations.

Within the cube sits three levels: "Bob-omb Battlefield", "Cool, Cool Mountain" and "Lethal Lava Land" as well as Princess

Peach's Castle, which acted as the game's hub-world where Mario could jump into paintings to collect stars. The attention to detail in each level is staggering, with references to some of the game's memorable moments such as the hidden slide inside Cool, Cool Mountain and the winding gauntlet that leads to the game's first boss-fight with King Bob-omb.

Super Mario 64 set the bar for every other 3D platformer that came after it and this set is another wonderful tribute to one of Mario's most literal game-changing outings.

Buy now



Lego 'Sonic the Hedgehog' green hill zone: £59.99, Lego

It's hard to believe, but at one point in time, Sega's blue mascot was as popular, if not more so, than Nintendo's Super Mario. In the original console wars of the early Nineties, the Sega Megadrive launched with *Sonic the Hedgehog*, a side-scrolling platformer that put speed and momentum before anything else.

The first level, green hill zone, has been lovingly recreated, complete with blocky palm trees, collectable rings, checkpoints and a loop-de-loop. It was actually designed by a fan and voted for on the Lego ideas page and the attention to detail really shines through.

The Sonic mini-figure that comes with it has its own display stand and also features the game's antagonist, Dr Robotnik. Adding one of the game's "chaos emeralds" to Sonic's collection after each section is completed is also an inspired choice and is a great size and depth for display.

Buy now



Lego Icons Atari 2600: £209.99, Lego

If you're interested in reconstructing a true icon of the late Seventies and early Eighties, the Atari 2600 is one of the most recognisable consoles of that era, and was responsible for popularising classics such as *Asteroids*, *Centipede*, and *Adventure*.

All three of those have not only been reproduced with scale-accurate cartridges but also include their own elaborate dioramas that sit independently from the console itself.

The console features solid, clicky switches for different power/gaming options, and the front panel can be pulled open to reveal a miniature bedroom with an even smaller Atari 2600 setup inside. It's a lovely tribute to one of gaming's earliest (and most notorious) home consoles.

Buy now



Special barcodes can be scanned by the Mario figurine as he comes into contact with them. Sound effects and voice clips will be played in correspondence with each interactive piece (such as getting coins from a question block or jumping on the goomba's head) and as the set is modular, different parts can be moved around to recreate an entire level.

Buy now

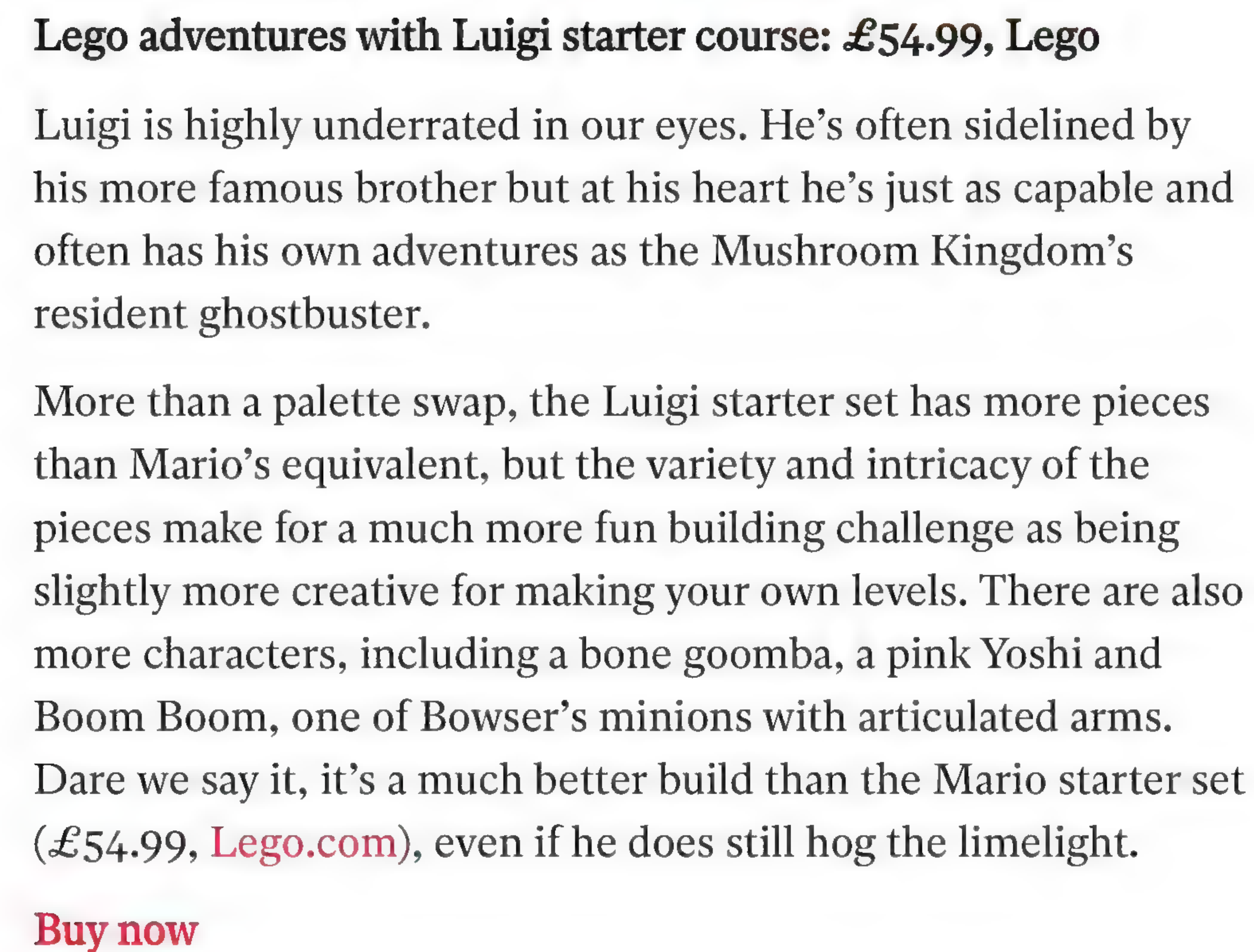


Lego Bowser's airship: £89.99, Lego

One of the larger expansions for the Lego Super Mario line, Bowser's airship is a far more intricate build as a large airborne pirate vessel. Not only are there two intricately detailed Bowser-shaped figureheads on the ship's bow and stern, but the centre of the ship can fold outwards to access compartments inside.

While a larger build, it's much more simple to assemble than it looks but it wouldn't look out of place sitting on a display shelf or as part of a larger level design when added to the rest of the Lego Super Mario line. The airship also comes with a canon to "launch" the Mario figurine from (not included) as well as three enemies: a Kamek, a Rocky Wrench and a Goomba (complete with pirate hat, so you know he's in charge) to add to the collection.

Buy now





**Lego 'Luigi's Mansion' haunt-and-seek expansion set: £69.99,
Lego**

If Mario can leave the Mushroom Kingdom behind to fight Bowser and collect stars, then Luigi can have his own adventures clearing out ghosts in haunted mansions.

Luigi's Mansion is one of Nintendo's most interesting spin-off series, with the most recent game being *Luigi's Mansion 3* on the Nintendo Switch (£49.99, [Nintendo.co.uk](https://www.nintendo.co.uk)). This expansion set does an excellent job of recreating the spooky interiors of the game, complete with spectral visitors including, a garbage can ghost, a grabbing ghost and King Boo. Toad also makes an appearance and can be rescued from a haunted painting.

The haunt-and-seek expansion set itself contains four modular rooms with a rotating corridor in the middle that separates them all. Three hidden gems can be found in each of the separate rooms and stomped on by the Luigi figurine to collect more coins before confronting King Boo in his tower.

Buy now



Lego Super Mario character packs – Series 4: £3.49, Lego

If you're content with the quantity of pieces available in the Mario and Luigi starter courses but still want some variety then an affordable addition could be some new characters to construct levels with.

The current character packs include one of ten new characters that come with their own display stand or can be used in level designs with their own scannable action tag for the plumbers to jump on. These packs include a Mechakoopa, Para-Biddybud, Stingby, Bully, Freezie, Ant Trooper, Goombrat, Coin Coffin, Scaredy Rat or a baby penguin.

It should be noted that as each pack is sold as a blind bag, there's no guarantee that you will get exactly the one you hope for but each one can be used to build on your existing collection.

Buy now

The verdict

For adults, the **Nintendo entertainment system** is tough to beat. It offers enough challenge and mechanical complexity, and it's both an excellent item to display as well as interact with after it's finished. The console itself looks remarkably similar to the real deal from a distance, while being marginally smaller, and there

are plenty of nods to Super Mario's long history featured inside. For a smaller and more affordable build, the *Sonic the Hedgehog green hill zone* set also makes for a nostalgia-heavy display piece that fans will love.

For children, the *Adventures with Mario starter course* is an excellent purchase as is the *Adventures with Luigi starter course*. Both encourage active play, and their modular nature lends itself well to being torn down repeatedly and rebuilt to make a variety of interesting levels. The smartphone app is intuitive to use and helpful for designing different levels in unique ways. It's a collaboration only Lego and Nintendo could master.

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Section 2/ Ask Simon Calder

Which European cities have easily accessible airports?



Nice is a clear winner if you want a destination you get around easily (iStock)

Q We have been dreaming about a few European city breaks in the next year and were wondering what cities are served by airports that are not too far from them? We can think of Lisbon, for example, but what are the others? Which are best, in your opinion? We don't want to spend too long commuting to and from the airport.

**“I need a holiday” via the latest Ask Me Anything at
independent.co.uk/travel**

A “Airports within walking distance of the city they serve” is something of a specialist subject of mine (perhaps I should get out more?). In Europe, I regard Nice as the clear winner. The Promenade des Anglais begins where the airport perimeter ends, so you can walk into the city beside the Mediterranean. Alternatively, using the excellent Vélo Bleu service, you can pay €1 and pick up a bike for the journey from the stand close to the airport, and pedal into town. Your single-euro investment covers rentals up to 30 minutes for a spell of 24 hours, and there are loads of places to drop it off.

Second in line is Pisa: it’s around a 30-40 minute walk from the airport to the city centre, though not on so agreeable a road.

Corfu deserves a mention, with a pleasant zig-zag through a residential area into the island’s capital.

Lisbon is not high on my list: although the airport is fairly central, the only walkable location is the area around Oriente station, to the east of the main part of the city, and the bus and metro links are slow and winding.

You are really, of course, asking about short transfers from plane to city. For me, two German cities share second place: Bremen and Nuremberg. Both are relatively small and a journey into town on a tram or a U-Bahn (underground) train takes just 12 minutes.

But Geneva beats everywhere; the train from the airport’s own station takes only seven minutes, and almost unbelievably there is a machine in the arrivals hall that dispenses free public transport tickets – valid for up to 80 minutes, including connections anywhere in the city.

Email your question to s@hols.tv or tweet @simoncalder

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Section 2



ON THIS DAY



Opera singer Maria Callas was found dead in her Paris flat on this day in 1977 (Getty)

1386: The future Henry V of England was born in Monmouth Castle in Wales. “Bluff” Prince Hal became a ruthless king who fought two bloody campaigns, which came to a climax at Agincourt. In 1422 he died unheroically of dysentery at the French Castle of Vincennes.

1620: The 102 Pilgrim Fathers set sail from Plymouth in the Mayflower, captained by Myles Standish.

1847: The United Shakespeare Company bought the house in which Shakespeare was born at Stratford-upon-Avon in Warwickshire for £3,000. It was the first building in Britain to be officially preserved.

1861: The Post Office Savings Bank was instituted.

1908: The American car firms Buick and Oldsmobile merged to form General Motors.

1945: John McCormack, lyrical Irish tenor, died in Dublin. “I have hung up my harp, all my songs are sung,” he is reported to have written just before he died.

1946: *Have a Go!* began on the Light Programme, with Wilfred Pickles, who started each programme by saying: “How do, ’Ow are yer?” The show ran for more than 20 years.

1968: The “two-tier” postal system was introduced in Britain: first and second class.

1977: Opera singer Maria Callas was found dead in her Paris flat, aged 53.

1989: The classic horse race St Leger at Doncaster was abandoned when officials declared the course unsafe.

On this day last year: SpaceX sent the first ever all-civilian-crewed rocket into orbit from the Kennedy Space Centre.

Birthdays

Micky Stewart, former cricketer, 90; **George Chakiris**, actor, 90; **Ed Begley Jr**, actor, 73; **Mickey Rourke**, actor, 70; **David Copperfield**, magician, 66; **Neville Southall**, former footballer, 64; **Richard Marx**, singer/songwriter, 59; **Marc Anthony**, musician and actor, 54; **Tina Barrett**, pop singer (former member of S Club 7), 46.

PA

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Section 2/ Inside Film

Indiana Jones: ‘It’s not the years ... it’s the mileage’

As Harrison Ford claims it’s his final outing as the kick-ass archaeologist, **Geoffrey Macnab** looks back over his career and says the action star knows it’s the perfect time to quit



Ford and Phoebe Waller-Bridge on the set of ‘Indiana Jones 5’ (Getty)

“This is it!” Harrison Ford told an adoring audience last weekend about throwing the towel in as Indiana Jones. “I will not fall down for you again.” He had just introduced a new trailer

for *Indiana Jones 5* at the D23 Expo, a Disney fan event held in California – the film is yet to receive its official title and won't be in cinemas until next summer. He was standing alongside *Fleabag*'s Phoebe Waller-Bridge, who plays his goddaughter, and the film's director, James Mangold.

It's been 14 years since the last Indiana Jones movie was released, *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull*. Just like its predecessors, the new movie promises to be rip-roaring fare with explosions, chases and conspiracy aplenty. The supporting cast looks very impressive: Antonio Banderas, Mads Mikkelsen, Toby Jones and Waller-Bridge are all along for the ride as the kick-ass archaeologist goes in search of Noah's Ark.

It is easy to understand why Indiana Jones's latest adventure is already provoking such a nostalgic response so many months in advance of its release. It marks both its octogenarian star's comeback and his farewell as an action star. After this last adventure, there will be no more cracking the bullwhip or running away from boulders, or venturing inside Temples of Doom. This isn't Ford's retirement. He'll soon be seen opposite Helen Mirren in a 1920s-set prequel to the TV series *Yellowstone* – but it is the last time he'll be performing those harum-scarum big screen stunts everyone loves him for.

The prospect of signing off as Indiana Jones seemed to choke up Ford himself. His voice wavered and he pointed to his heart as he talked about the new movie.



As it was reported in the media that Harrison Ford was “holding back tears” and “emotional” at D23, the surprise was obvious. Ford has lasted at the top of the Hollywood A-list for 50 years without ever previously showing any outward sign of sentimentality in public. That is one of the reasons audiences cherish him. He’s one of those craggy, old-style Hollywood figures who tend to keep their feelings firmly in check. In interviews, he is dry, very deadpan, and rarely gives much away.

“He guards his private life with a passion bordering on the obsessive,” one biographer complained about the movie star who was nicknamed “Mr Mum” by the media. Nonetheless, here he was, tremulously holding forth about a role that clearly means far more to him than just another pay cheque, and that will put the seal on one of the most astonishing careers in recent Hollywood history.

It would be a mistake to call Ford an accidental movie star. He set out very deliberately as a young man to become an actor and headed to Los Angeles in pursuit of his dream. His films, according to Box Office Mojo, have now made an astonishing \$5.5bn in North America alone, a higher figure than Tom Cruise has achieved. Nonetheless, his progress through the film industry has always had a haphazard quality.

When Ford first arrived in town in the late 1960s, Columbia Studios dismissed him from their talent development programme because he “lacked star quality”. By then, he had a family to support and so made his living as a self-taught carpenter instead. The way the hand-carved anecdotes come down is that he landed his breakthrough roles by chance, largely because he was employed as a tradesman by film industry clients who, at the time, were struggling to cast their movies. He had been doing work for executive Fred Roos who felt he might be a good fit as the charismatic hot rod racer in George Lucas’s *American Graffiti* (1973).



Ford got the role of Han Solo in 'Star Wars' after working as a carpenter at Francis Ford Coppola's office when George Lucas and Richard Dreyfuss walked in to begin casting the film (Lucasfilm/Fox/Kobal/Shutterstock)

In his biography of Lucas, author John Baxter writes about Ford's unwillingness to take the role. The pay was \$480 a week and he was already making twice that amount for his carpentry work. Roos, therefore, bumped up his salary.

In his cowboy hat and with an arrogant grin on his face, Ford was cocksure and looked altogether more mature than his co-stars. By then, he was 30 after all. It was a striking performance in a role that was little more than a cameo. Nonetheless, he was soon busy again with the clamps, drills, hammers and saws. His woodworking skills provided a more reliable way of making a living than appearing in front of the cameras.

"I was working on an elaborate portico entrance to Francis Ford Coppola's offices, working as a carpenter, when George [Lucas] walked in with Richard Dreyfuss to begin the first of the interviews for *Star Wars*. Somehow, that rang a bell with George and I became eventually Han Solo," Ford explained in a typical matter-of-fact fashion to *Vanity Fair* about how he came aboard one of the biggest movie franchises in cinema history. He hadn't actually been canvassing for the part but, typically, got it anyway.

It was a similar story with *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. Steven Spielberg and Lucas had already offered Indiana Jones to Tom Selleck but he was too busy playing the detective hero in TV's

Magnum PI. By then, the production was only a few weeks away from shooting. It was time, again, to turn to the master carpenter.

Whereas other newcomers might have seemed overwhelmed at the huge opportunities being given to them, Ford took the roles in his stride. “George, you can type this shit but you sure can’t say it,” he is alleged to have told Lucas, who was two years younger than him, after reading the dialogue in the *Star Wars* screenplay.

Ford had traits that were very contradictory. On the one hand, he possessed the brashness and defiance that characterised method-style screen rebels like James Dean or Marlon Brando. On the other, he was thoroughly dependable – the type who’d always complete any job he started. There was nothing neurotic about him. He had an everyman quality that, in later years, would qualify him to play presidents and professors, as well as action heroes. Like Henry Fonda in *The Grapes of Wrath*, he is someone viewers instinctively trust. Whether he is sitting in the cockpit of a spaceship making small talk with a hirsute friend like Chewbacca in *Star Wars* or dressed in a suit as a Wall Street executive opposite Melanie Griffith and Sigourney Weaver in *Working Girl* (1988), he always seems authentic and at ease.



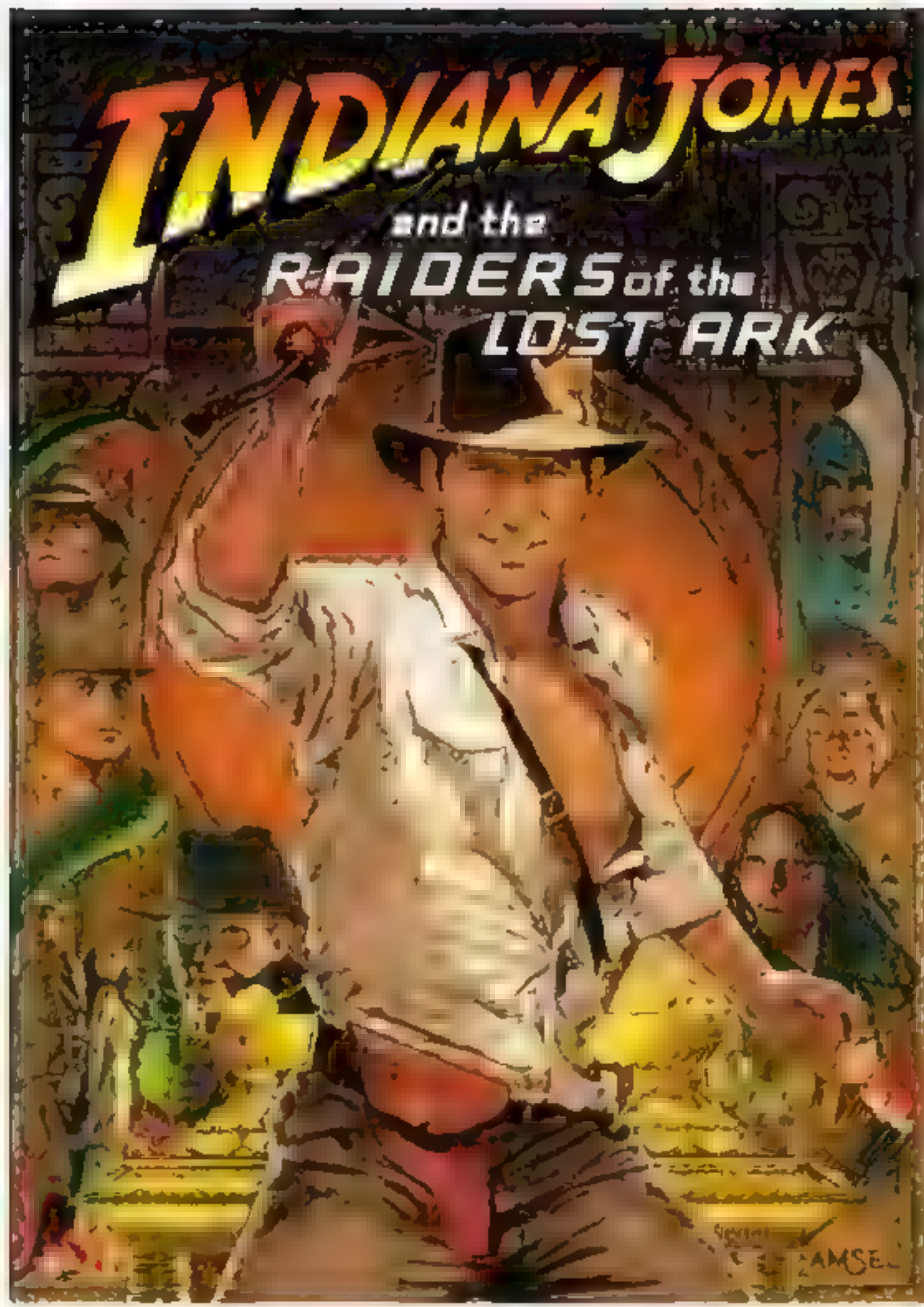
He played Deckard in Ridley Scott’s sci-fi detective classic ‘Blade Runner’ in 1982 with a mix of brutality and yearning that evoked memories of the best private eyes in Hollywood film noir (Ladd Company/Warner Bros/Kobal/Shutterstock)

Another side of Ford's personality that perversely attracts fans is his curmudgeonly quality. In interviews and on screen, he can often seem very bad-tempered indeed. Acting mean, though, has its benefits. As he has grown older, Ford may have lost his athleticism but he can still scowl with the best of them. It's instructive to watch him as the Scrooge-like TV newscaster Mike Pomeroy, reluctantly revealing his "fluffy" side in Roger Michell's underrated romantic comedy, *Morning Glory* (2010). Pomeroy takes himself very seriously. He has reported from every foreign war going and has a nose for hard news.

"I've won eight Peabodys. A Pulitzer. 16 Emmys. I was shot through the forearm in Bosnia. Pulled Colin Powell from a burning Jeep. I laid a cool washcloth on Mother Teresa's forehead during a cholera epidemic. I've had lunch with Dick Cheney," he says, laying out his credentials. The veteran anchor reacts very badly when he ends up, for contractual reasons, co-hosting a *Richard and Judy*-style breakfast show devoted to showbiz gossip, chit-chat about the weather, and cooking. Ford shows a gruff malice that even Bill Murray would struggle to match. He bullies and exasperates the show's producer – played by Rachel McAdams. We know, though, that he will reveal his inner decency in time for the end credits.

There has often been a little Pomeroy in even Ford's most conventional leading man roles. Think of him playing Indiana Jones for the first time in *Raiders of the Lost Ark* in that famous scene in which he takes on the swordsman. The swordsman twirls his blade extravagantly. We expect Jones to use his bullwhip against him but, instead, with a look of haughty disdain that shows he doesn't have time for such tomfoolery, he pulls out a gun and shoots the man instead.

"We like our men like we like our coffee – hot, grumpy and named Harrison Ford," is the catchline for *The Fordcast*, a podcast in honour of the actor, which ran for more than 50 episodes and dissected his career in the minutest detail. Lauren Milberger, who created the podcast together with Rachel Leishman, was one of the many young fans who grew up with a poster of Ford as Indiana Jones in her bedroom.



Now we are going to get the last sight of Harrison Ford as Indiana Jones – and what might be our very last sight of him on the big screen (Lucasfilm Ltd/Shutterstock)

“If you grew up at a certain time in the world, or the United States, he [Ford] was a big deal,” Milberger tells me. She has seen “99 per cent” of the films and TV shows that the actor has made. “There are some of his television appearances that I don’t think can be found,” she says of the missing 1 per cent.

As for Ford’s grumpiness, she suggests it is partly put on. “You can sometimes keep your privacy if you have a bit of a persona that is stand-offish.”

Ford, Milberger believes, is far more versatile than his reputation as the rugged all-American hero suggests. “Harrison Ford wanted to be a character actor but, at every step of the way, the audience or producer said, ‘No, no, no, you’re a handsome action star.’” Ford, therefore, started “sneaking” idiosyncratic elements into characters who seemed bland and one-dimensional on the page. For example, he showed up on set for the thriller *Presumed Innocent* (1990) with a deliberately terrible haircut while insisting on having a beard for the opening sequences of *The Fugitive* (1993).

It is revealing to watch him in Wolfgang Petersen’s *Air Force One* (1997), in which he played a fictional US president. In the early scenes, he is authoritative and statesman-like but the moment his wife and daughter are put at risk, he immediately shows his inner Rambo.



As Richard Kimble, the wrongly accused man on the run in 'The Fugitive' in 1993 (Warner Bros/Kobal/Shutterstock)

Like James Stewart in his films with Alfred Hitchcock, Ford also excels in playing men under sudden and extreme stress. He was excellent as the surgeon whose wife is kidnapped in Roman Polanski's *Frantic* (1988) and as Richard Kimble, the wrongly accused man on the run in *The Fugitive*. He played Deckard in Ridley Scott's sci-fi detective classic *Blade Runner* (1982) with a mix of brutality and yearning that evoked memories of the best private eyes in Hollywood film noir.

Ford is expert at going against the grain. He brings a soulful quality to his action roles and a sense of mischief to his more strait-laced characters. He is one of the biggest movie stars of his era and yet seems very down to earth. He may be a top movie star but there was a period when he seemed to be in the press more often for having mishaps in small planes he enjoyed flying than for appearing in blockbusters.

Podcaster Milberger recalls her astonishment at recently meeting a young Marvel fan in his twenties who had never heard of Ford. This may be incomprehensible to *Star Wars* and *Raiders of the Lost Ark* fans but it reflects the fact that Ford has hardly been seen in movies in recent years. Now we are going to get the last sight of him as Indiana Jones – and what might be our very last sight of him on the big screen.

“It’s not the years, honey, it’s the mileage,” Indiana Jones quipped in *Raiders of the Lost Ark* about growing old. It’s one thing playing an archaeologist and another looking like something he has just dug up. Ford is the most enduring and best-loved matinee idol of his era, but he knows that now is the perfect time to call it quits in action movies.

‘Indiana Jones 5’ is set to be released on 30 June next year

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Section 2/ Film reviews

PARADISE REGAINED

Julia Roberts and George Clooney's first romcom together, 'Ticket to Paradise', is a screwball joy but 'Goodnight Mommy' is a po-faced remake, says **Clarisse Loughrey**



Fantasy island: Roberts and Clooney in 'Ticket to Paradise' (Universal Pictures)

★★★★☆

Dir: Ol Parker. Starring: George Clooney, Julia Roberts, Kaitlyn Dever, Maxime Bouttier, Billie Lourd, Lucas Bravo. 12A, 104

minutes.

It's a joy to watch Julia Roberts and George Clooney fall in love. It's an even greater joy to watch them bicker. As embittered exes in *Ticket to Paradise*, flying to Bali in order to stop the whirlwind nuptials of their daughter (Kaitlyn Dever) to a local seaweed farmer (Maxime Bouttier), the duo have been provided a full buffet of snappish asides. They're heirs to that great screwball tradition. Think back to Claudette Colbert, hitching a car ride with a coquettish flash of the leg in order to tease Clarke Gable in *It Happened One Night*. Or to Cary Grant at wit's end in the face of Katharine Hepburn's scatterbrained antics in *Bringing Up Baby*.

Here, when Georgia (Roberts) and David (Clooney) are – incidentally – sat next to each other at their daughter's graduation, they tussle over armrests. When they're – again, incidentally – booked together on the plane over, they lock themselves into a death grip while riding out a patch of rough turbulence. And, when they find out their hotel rooms adjoin – at this point, the coincidences seem a little suspicious – they immediately launch into an argument over David's thunderous snores.

Ticket to Paradise immediately recalls the tempestuous relationship Roberts and Clooney shared as the romantic leads of the Ocean's Eleven films. Though they've racked up a fair amount of screen time together, including in 2016's *Money Monster*, this is their first genuine romantic comedy as a pair. That it works is largely because their methods haven't changed. Aside from the joke in which a dolphin makes a B-line for David's crotch (he later claims it's a leg injury, but the evidence speaks for itself), and some drunken boomer dancing, there's very little here that's gurning or goofy.

The draw of a Roberts/Clooney vehicle, then, is the poker game of words played by two people who've always carried with them an air of security. They're the appointed adults in the room, so it doesn't really matter how ferociously they fight – you know they're sensible enough never to dig their claws in so deep that

it draws blood. Matters will always be settled. And love, inevitably, will blossom.

Director Ol Parker's job is to simply paint around the two, in bright but soothing shades. He's cast the film in the same mould as *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* (2011) and *Mamma Mia! Here We Go Again* (2018). The film presents Bali as a postcard-ready fantasy that'll have eager romantics booking flights. But Parker also doesn't forget that it's a real place, with real people living in it. The locals – including Bouttier's Gede and his father, Agung Pindha's dryly humorous Wayan – are key to the story.

Parker's script, co-written with Daniel Pipski, is far more sentimental than it is humorous. It's rooted in a parent's fear that their children are such perfect models of themselves that they're bound to repeat the same mistakes. David, at one point, confesses that he's at his most vulnerable in the highs of his daughter's life – “that's when you get scared, because you don't want things to change”.

It's familiar emotional territory, and Dever and Bouttier feel particularly underserved by how blandly straightforward their romance is, despite it supposedly providing the film's central propulsion. Parker does seem somewhat aware of this, considering he's taken the easiest route and thrown Billie Lourd into the mix, as Dever's college bestie. She's essentially playing the same scene-stealing, bon vivant weirdo as in 2019's *Booksmart*: hysterically funny while always having a minimum of two day-glo-tinged cocktails glued to her hands. *Emily in Paris*'s Lucas Bravo, too, delivers the perfect, totally witless comic reactions as Georgia's French himbo pilot boyfriend Paul.

Combined, Lourd and Bravo provide a key antithesis to Roberts and Clooney's sophisticated shtick. They're the right ingredients. Parker uses them in the right amounts. It's (almost) enough to justify the fact the film ends with a mid-jump freeze frame.

'Ticket to Paradise' is in cinemas from Tuesday

Remake fails to save face



Persona non grata: a blameless Naomi Watts (Prime Video)

Goodnight Mommy

★★☆☆☆

Dir: Matt Sobel. Starring: Naomi Watts, Cameron Crovetti, Nicholas Crovetti, Peter Hermann, Crystal Lucas-Perry, Jeremy Bobb. 15, 91 minutes.

Goodnight Mommy was a 2014 Austrian horror that came and went with a small murmur of excitement, largely due to the twist hidden in its final act. Two kids, Lukas and Elias, bearing the feral stares and thin faces of baby bogeymen, arrive home one afternoon to find their mum back from the hospital. She's undergone a cosmetic procedure and her head is covered in bandages. But dear mother is so strange now: she refuses to acknowledge Lukas, and grows cruel and violent when the boys disobey her. Soon, they become convinced she's been replaced by an imposter.

The film, directed by Veronika Franz and Severin Fiala, defined itself both through its cruelty and its sparseness – a cousin to the works of fellow Austrian provocateur Michael Haneke, with a dash of *The Shining's* alienating architecture. The American remake, of course, ignores all of this. It's a telephone game approach to repurposing art. The film recounts the original

without quite remembering what genre it was, what it was trying to do, or what it was trying to say.

The first mistake of this new, commercialised *Goodnight Mommy* is Naomi Watts. Not her performance – Watts is a profoundly talented actor who's rarely given the credit she deserves – but the fact she is a known and recognised entity, which is the exact opposite of what this story demands.

Goodnight Mommy hinges on the terror of the unknown: what lies behind those bandages? Horns? Fangs? Other demonic features? No, it's just the face of the woman who should have won an Oscar for *Mulholland Drive* (2001).

The role was played with an imperial coldness in Franz and Fiala's original by relative newcomer Susanne Wuest. But here, because Watts is Watts, the film must reconfigure itself around her, shifting clumsily away from disquieting horror to a more conventional portrait of a woman on the brink. Watts gets a lovely, modern home seemingly furnished by Habitat; a handsome and kind estranged husband (Peter Hermann); and a glass of chardonnay in the evening. What first concerns her children (Nicholas Crovetti and Cameron Crovetti), who look like the squeaky-voiced protagonists of an Amblin film, isn't any kind of alien behaviour. It's the fact she now smokes.

In short, she's too human. Watts is an actor who always seems a second away from shattering, as if a tidal wave of emotion is about to burst out. When she waterboards Elias in the shower, it doesn't read as nightmare fodder but as straightforward child abuse. And it's not because *Goodnight Mommy* is attempting to radically question our concept of "monstrous women"; director Matt Sobel still approaches the material as horror (although the film's third act gore fest has been thoroughly sanitised and replaced with a few random dream sequences).

And the twist? It's more concealed here than in the original film, but in such a haphazard way that I can only imagine it's even more obvious here. Kyle Warren's screenplay tries so desperately to skirt around the truth that the dialogue is filled with non-sequiturs – phrases that don't read as ambiguous in meaning, but empty of it. All in all, the film is exactly as you'd

imagine a Hollywood remake to be. It's too po-faced, too stripped of its meanness. And so drearily inevitable.

'Goodnight Mommy' is on Prime Video

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Section 2/ Album reviews

No punches pulled on this heavy, heavy monster sound

On his eponymous first solo album, Marcus Mumford takes his childhood abuse trauma and confronts it head on, says **Helen Brown**. Plus, Rina Sawayama makes therapy fun



The Mumford & Sons frontman has produced a work that isn't an easy listen (Eric Ray Davidson)

★★★★☆

“How should we proceed / Without things getting too heavy?” asks Marcus Mumford on his first solo album. It’s a reasonable question to ask of both himself and his listeners because the 10 raw songs on this self-titled record find the singer processing the sexual abuse he experienced as a child. He was apparently so concerned about triggering other victims that he sent all the lyrics to a trauma specialist to ensure he’d “reflected reality”.

This doesn’t mean he pulls any punches. The self-described former “fat kid from London”, who started out playing drums for Laura Marling and formed his own nu-folk band Mumford & Sons in 2007, has always worn his heart on his sleeve. His parents were both church leaders and he brought a preacher’s zeal into full-throated stadium anthems such as “I Will Wait”. When banjo player Winston Marshall left the band in response to the backlash he got for tweeting praise for far-right authors, the ever-inclusive Mumford “begged” him to stay.

But the dubious forgiveness offered on this album takes longer to materialise. There’s a whispered rage in the opening verse of the first track, “Cannibal”, that’s worth quoting in full. “I can still taste you and I hate it,” he sings, over the vibrating bass strings of his acoustic guitar. “That wasn’t a choice in the mind of a child and you knew it/ You took the first slice of me and you ate it raw/ Ripped it in with your teeth and your lips like a cannibal/ You fucking animal.” He moves swiftly from accusation to consequence, owning the bodily fallout along with its emotional counterpart: “It kills me/ That there’s still some sick part of it that thrills me/ That my own body keeps betraying me.”

The suppressed, acoustic intensity of the song explodes into a synth-backed crescendo. But Mumford’s big yearning yawp of a voice – so often positioned warmly front-of-house in the mix on recordings with Mumford & Sons – is buried behind the instrumentation. It’s as though he’s handing over the experience. The technique is effective, with other abuse victims gathering online to thank him for expressing what they could not. There’s always been a congregational spirit to his band’s old-time folk rock, which invites bawl-alongs at gigs. This is

equally collective in intent, but more evocative of the hushed circle of chairs at a support group.

In an interview with *GQ* earlier this year, the 35-year-old offered some details of his experience. He said that in the silence of lockdown, he'd been forced to confront "that thing that happened when I was six, that was the first of a string of really unusual, unhealthy sexual experiences at a really early age ... when I was under the age of 12, which set my brain up in a way to deal with stuff later on in life in an imbalanced way".

He is keen to stress that his abuser was not part of the church in which he was raised. But he didn't tell his parents. So it's his mother who is addressed on "Grace", as a cradle-rocked riff evokes a hushed take on Tom Petty's "Free Fallin'". "Better Off High" addresses the "addictive behaviours" of which Mumford has spoken. The AM radio beat of tracks such as "Better Angels" is redolent of Eighties-era Springsteen, while "Dangerous" has a murkier, more menacing bass line. In fact, much of the album has an appropriately lo-fi, night-drive Springsteen album-track sound. The ambient skirl and churn of electric guitars and tape loops in the background keep things edgy. It's like the sound of passing cars – possible threats. Mumford sounds like he's in the passenger seat with his acoustic on his lap.

Mumford has quit drinking, but here credits that "medicine" as a coping mechanism that kept him together until he was ready to face the damage of his past. The lovely vocals of Phoebe Bridgers weave carefully through his on "Stonecatcher". She supports him gently – a harmonising therapist – through the realisation that: "This light/ Glowing neon in the corner of my mind/ Burns and burns but leaves no warmth behind/ I kinda wish you'd just done it in the dark." She unlocks something that allows his voice to soar free of the situation.

It feels uncomfortable for me to point out that there aren't a lot of tunes on this record. This stuff has to come out the way it wants. It's hardly singalong material. It is – necessarily – heavy. But it also fulfils Mumford's intention, learnt from Beyoncé, he says, to leave us with hope.

Plain-speaking and searching second album



British-Japanese pop star flits between moods (Satellite 414)

Rina Sawayama – *Hold the Girl*

★★★★☆

Rina Sawayama has been learning how to parent. Not a child of her own, mind you, but the child she once was. On her second album *Hold the Girl*, a follow-up to her genre-mashing 2020 debut, the British-Japanese pop star sits down with her younger self for some frank conversations about childhood trauma and open wounds. Somehow, she also manages to have some fun along the way.

With its delicate guitar and soft synths, “Minor Feelings” is a lovely but uncharacteristically sombre opener for Sawayama, an artist whose default setting is 11. It doesn’t take long for things to heat up, though. The title track, which sees the singer comfort her younger self, is a hypnotic, Gaga-style whirligig of garage and disco strings. “This Hell” deploys a foot-stomping, dance-ready diatribe against homophobes with nods to Shania Twain – including the obligatory “Let’s go girls!” at the intro. “Saw a poster on the corner opposite the motel/ Turns out I’m going to hell if I keep on being myself,” she belts on this anthem celebrating queer joy.

Never an artist to stick to a single lane, Sawayama flits between moods across the album. Influences range from Madonna to Avril Lavigne, Kelly Clarkson to The Corrs. “Send My Love to John” is a downbeat country number written from the perspective of immigrant parents in the Seventies. Album closer “To Be Alive”, meanwhile, is a bombastic affirmation of life with a beat that brushes against hyper-pop. There is a new forthrightness to her lyrics, the kind often found in country music. Whether Sawayama is attempting to process an early trauma with the electro-bhangra sound of “Your Age”, or repair the fractured relationship with her mother on the sing-song ballad “Catch Me In The Air”, her lyrics remain clear-eyed and plain-speaking.

This album also includes some of her best vocal work: a gorgeous, swelling tenor capable of filling out the cheap seats. *Hold the Girl* is eclectic and searching, a little glossier than Sawayama’s debut, perhaps, but also much more introspective.
Annabel Nugent

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Business

On brand: retailer Patagonia puts itself at the forefront of fighting the climate crisis

Josh Marcus looks at whether the clothing firm's founder has come up with a sustainable plan by giving his company away



Founder Yvon Chouinard and his family are handing over shares worth \$3bn (Patagonia)

In 2011, the outdoor clothing brand Patagonia ran what might be the most iconic sweater advertisement of all time. It took out a full page in the *New York Times* during the Black Friday season, urging customers: “Don’t Buy This Jacket.”

“We ask you to buy less and to reflect before you spend a dime on this jacket or anything else,” the ad read. “Don’t buy what you don’t need,” it continued, noting it took 135 litres of water and 20 pounds of CO₂ to manufacture each one.

The message was tantamount to heresy in the retail world but nothing new for the Ventura, California-based retailer, which has always been on the cutting edge of sustainability, a place where one experiences the competing tensions of social and financial good more than anywhere else in the business world. The ad, despite its message, was a boon for the company’s sales.

Now, Patagonia is pushing this mindset, in all its challenges and innovations, to its furthest logical limits. On Wednesday, company founder Yvon Chouinard and his family, who control the business, announced they would be giving 100 per cent of their shares in Patagonia, worth an estimated \$3bn (£2.6bn), over to a trust and charity dedicated to fighting the climate crisis.

“Hopefully this will influence a new form of capitalism that doesn’t end up with a few rich people and a bunch of poor people,” Mr Chouinard, 83, told the *New York Times*. “We are going to give away the maximum amount of money to people who are actively working on saving this planet.”

The move not only funnels the company’s roughly \$100m a year in profit towards environmentalism, but locks in an ownership structure the family says is designed to ensure the company continues running in a sustainable way, with commitments such as going carbon neutral and only using renewable or recycled materials by 2025.



The Patagonia campus in Ventura, California (Patagonia)

In August, the Chouinards gave their 2 per cent voting stock in the company over to an entity called the Patagonia Purpose Trust, overseen by the family and close advisers, while the other 98 per cent went to a charity called the Holdfast Collective dedicated to climate causes. The corporate tax structure means the collective can spend directly on political advocacy and lobby to influence policy.

When Leslie Davis Burns, a professor emerita at Oregon State University who taught global sourcing and corporate social responsibility, heard the news, she said she cracked a big smile “I just went, this is so Patagonia,” she said. “As an activist company, they have always pushed what can we do and how can we do it differently and be authentic in making a difference.”

Such activist companies are rare in the business world period, not to mention the fashion industry, which has an awful track record on issues such as labour, waste and pollution. The company has always done things a little differently.

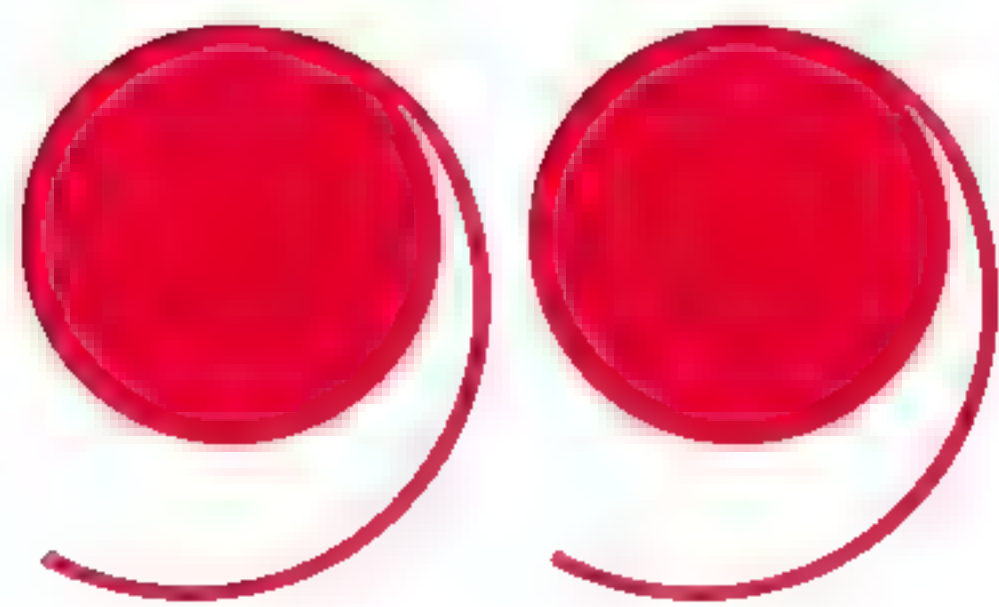
Yvon Chouinard, a self-described “reluctant businessman”, got his start as a wandering climber bum, blacksmithing rock climbing gear for use on the iconic walls of California’s Yosemite Valley in the 1950 and 60s. In 1970, after a climbing trip to Scotland, he started importing the rugged rugby shirts he encountered there and selling them to climbers. In 1972 Patagonia was born.

Even in these early days, the company was willing to change its approach and forgo profits if it meant leaving less of a trace on the planet. In the early 1970s, Mr Chouinard stopped selling stake-like pitons because they were scarring rock walls in climbing havens across the world, even though they made up 70 per cent of his hardware business at the time.



Hopefully this will influence a new form of capitalism that doesn't end up with a few rich people and a bunch of poor people

Patagonia founder Yvon Chouinard



Later, as Patagonia continued to grow, it made a shift to more pricey organic cotton in the 1990s, after an internal audit showed intensively farmed cotton was damaging to the environment.

It embraced other environmentally focused solutions well ahead of competitors, too, such as starting to make its fleece from recycled plastic bottles in 1993, an initiative that translated into 91 per cent of the company's fabrics in Autumn 2022 being made of recycled plastic.

The company also helps repair and resell customers' used gear, and began giving 1 per cent of its sales to environmental causes in 1985, an effort that would, in 2002, directly inspire the 1% for the Planet pledge, which has since been embraced by a wide range of companies.

Still, as time went on, Mr Chouinard, who famously does not own a computer or mobile phone, and would disappear into the

backcountry for months on end, began to chafe in his place in the corporate retail world.

High-performance outdoor gear was designed to be worn and pushed to the limit for years but was becoming a trendy mainstream fashion brand. Patagonia has even earned the nickname “Pata-Gucci” for its coveted, high-priced goods.



Chouinard got his start in the outdoor goods business making rock climbing equipment (Aurora Photos)

“We outgrew our loyal customer base and increasingly were selling to yuppies, posers and wannabes,” he told Inc. in 1992. “These people don’t need this shit to get in their Jeep Cherokees and drive to Connecticut for the weekend.”

Beyond the shifting market for Patagonia goods, the founder was struggling with what it meant to be a growing, successful company when that meant consuming ever more resources on a troubled planet. “I’ve been a businessman for almost 50 years,” he wrote in his 2006 memoir *Let My People Go Surfing*. “It’s as difficult for me to say those words as it is for someone to admit being an alcoholic or a lawyer.”

The following decade, the company drilled down deeper into overt activism. It helped, along with indigenous nations and environmentalists, lead a campaign to protect the planned Bears Ears National Monument in Utah from the Trump administration’s attempts to drastically reduce its size.

The company took unprecedented steps, from running its first-ever TV ads to call out then-interior secretary Ryan Zinke in his home state of Montana, to suing the Trump administration in 2017. The company changed its homepage to a massive banner that read, “The President Stole Your Land”. It was a militant update to “Don’t Buy This Jacket”. (In 2021, the Biden administration restored and slightly expanded the monument.)

The following year, the company launched Patagonia Action Works, a page directing customers to local grassroots environmental action. Despite having what multiple observers told *The Independent* was a “halo” around the brand, the company still has its critics and has made its own controversial decisions about social responsibility.

Patagonia, known for its fiery activism, spoke neither for nor against the 2021 Garment Worker Protection Act in California, establishing fair wages and improved conditions for clothing makers in the company’s home state, many of whom work not far from Ventura in clothing factories in Los Angeles.

Lynda Grose, a California College of the Arts professor, co-founded one of the first ecologically responsible clothing lines for the brand Esprit, another pioneering socially aware clothing brand, in 1990. She said in an email Patagonia is ushering in a “welcome conversation in an atmosphere of rampant

sustainability claims and one that is long overdue”, but notes that the company’s carbon footprint keeps growing nonetheless.

According to Patagonia’s most recent emissions report, the company’s direct, or Scope 1, carbon emissions have grown on balance since 2018. Other, more indirect, categories of emissions were down a small amount, the company said, “largely due to a decrease in our product inventory and the operational shutdowns due to Covid”.



A diagram illustrating Patagonia’s new ownership structure, which will funnel profits to fighting climate crisis (Patagonia)

Indeed, even with Wednesday’s announcement, the company noted in a press release it will keep reinvesting some money into its business. The company, despite the heroic gestures of its founder, is still a for-profit business, and for-profit businesses usually try to grow.

“Certainly profits put to the common good are profits well spent,” Ms Grose added. “We do need to keep asking questions about the nature of business, how the profits are made and what ecological and social impacts are incurred in making them.”

Though Patagonia has a long history of inspiring new best practices in the clothing industry and beyond, it’s unlikely many companies will repeat their most recent feat of directing most of their earnings towards activism.

“Public corporations have a much more difficult time with that,” Leslie Davis Burns said. “They have shareholders that are expecting growth. That’s the challenge when you have large corporations that have expectations around traditional business models that include growth.”

A few people can, however, though it’s doubtful they would see eye-to-eye with the Patagonia founder.

Barre Seid, the electronics magnate and major Republican donor, gave away 100 per cent of his shares in his business empire, worth \$1.6bn, in 2021 to a conservative political advocacy group headed by Leonard Leo. Mr Leo is the co-chair of the right-wing Federalist Society, a group that has worked to remake the federal court system with conservative judges often hostile to liberal priorities around environmental regulation.

Billionaire corporate philanthropy as a whole has come under scrutiny, whether the money comes from left-wingers such as Mr Chouinard, arch-conservatives or more centrist figures such as Amazon’s Jeff Bezos. Critics argue that having a small group of stratospherically wealthy individuals steer charitable priorities is both un-democratic and can result in certain causes that align with their subjective priorities getting more attention than the most urgent issues.

“The impact of philanthropy doesn’t always correlate with the size of the giving,” Heather Grady, a vice-president at Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors, told *Outside* magazine.

“Because it’s voluntary, funders can spend a lot of money that has virtually no impact – it’s not what’s needed but what they’re interested in.”

Sociologist Justin Farrell, author of the book *Billionaire Wilderness*, has shown that wealthy individuals in places such as Wyoming and Montana have poured money into their select charitable causes, sometimes even Patagonia-like endeavours to protect land, while unintentionally gentrifying away affordable housing and making communities unaffordable to the poor.

At the end of the day, according to Tom CW Lin, a Temple University law professor and author of 2022's *The Capitalist and the Activist: Corporate Social Activism and the New Business of Change*, Patagonia should be celebrated for what it's trying to do, while also serving as an example of what a corporation ultimately can't do on its own.

“It's really a commendable capstone to a pretty impressive business career by Yvon Chouinard,” Mr Lin told *The Independent*. “Three billion dollars is an incredibly large sum of money,” he added, “but in the context of a challenge like climate change, it's really a drop in the ocean. On an issue like climate change, you really need nation states and coordinated action to move in a concerted fashion.”

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Business

Ethereum cryptocurrency moves to 'green' blockchain



A cryptocurrency mining operation: before 'the Merge', ethereum had similar energy demands to the Netherlands (Getty)

ANTHONY CUTHBERTSON

Worldwide electricity consumption has dropped by 0.2 per cent after the world's second largest cryptocurrency switched to a "green blockchain", according to developers.

Ethereum completed a long-awaited transition to a proof-of-stake (PoS) system in an event known as the Merge on Thursday. By doing so, its energy needs dropped by more than 99 per cent in an instant.

Before the Merge, ethereum consumed roughly 112 TWh/yr using a proof-of-work (PoW) blockchain similar to bitcoin that required vast amounts of computing power to secure transactions and generate new units of the cryptocurrency.

This is roughly equivalent to the annual electricity consumption of a country the size of the Netherlands. Following ethereum's Merge, the total energy expenditure for securing the cryptocurrency is now close to 0.01 TWh/yr.

“The Merge will reduce worldwide electricity consumption by 0.2 per cent,” Justin Drake, a researcher at the Ethereum Foundation, claimed during a live-stream of the event.

Ethermine, the world's largest ether mining firm announced on Wednesday that it would be shutting down its crypto mining operations following the technical upgrade, unveiling a new staking pool to reward customers taking part in maintaining the network's integrity.

The switch to PoS from PoW, which bitcoin pioneered and still uses, is considered by many within the crypto space as one of the most momentous events in the history of the industry.

“A move to proof-of-stake for ethereum paves the way toward a more efficient and scalable industry in the long run,” Vijay Ayyar, vice-president of corporate development at the crypto exchange Luno, told *The Independent*.

“With a more environmentally sustainable network, the Merge could help improve how cryptocurrencies are viewed and attract institutional and retail investors. Ethereum successfully moving to proof-of-stake is also a huge point of validation that the technology works and will pave the way for many more POS networks to flourish.”

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John Lewis is admirable... but that alone won't save it



The partnership has issued a warning about a 'highly uncertain' end to the year (PA)

JAMES MOORE

Compare and contrast: in the green corner (I'm basing this on the corporate colours), we have John Lewis, which says it is "making a conscious choice to forgo profit to provide support for partners and consumers". There may not be a bonus paid to staff – who own the business – this year but there will be a one-off £500 cost of living payment and free meals during the busiest period of the year.

In the orange/yellow corner there is Amazon. Workers at its Coventry warehouse are holding their first-ever strike ballot over what the GMB union has called an “insulting” 35p an hour pay offer. The union says they are angry over a rise that amounts to just 3 per cent when the UK rate of inflation is nearly 10 per cent.

Amazon is one of the biggest, most powerful and most profitable companies in the world. It can afford to do better. And I believe it should. Based on that information, where would you rather shop?

The unpalatable truth is that many people are still choosing Amazon. Maybe it is out of habit. Maybe it is the prices, although Amazon is not always the cheapest. Membership of the group’s “Prime” subscription scheme makes consumers liable to stick around.

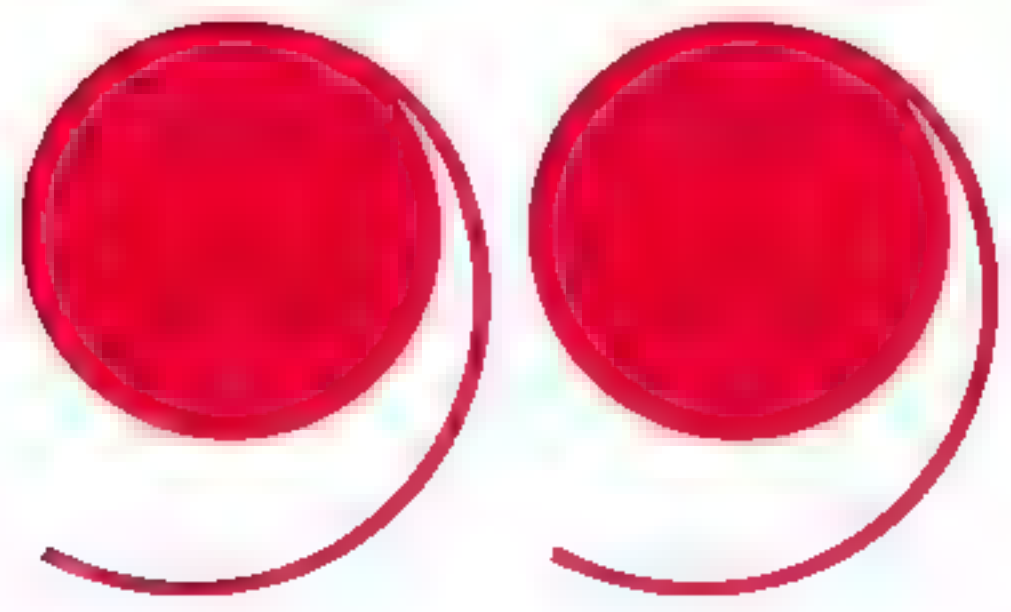
Like every other retailer in Britain, John Lewis has to try to compete with the behemoth on a profoundly unequal playing field. Amazon’s warehouses are sited where business rates are low. It is a multinational with the capacity to arrange itself to maximise its tax efficiency. Its corporation tax payments in the UK are reliable causes of controversy.

John Lewis, meanwhile, has a substantial estate of bricks-and-mortar stores where those rates are anything but cheap. The margins there are still decent. But volumes have declined as people have moved online. This is also a UK business. When it makes profits, it makes UK tax. It didn’t make any in the first half of the year. On the contrary, the partnership lost £99m pre-tax. It was £29m in the red last year, although shopping patterns then were affected by Covid.

First-half losses aren’t unusual in this sort of business, where revenues and earnings are heavily skewed to the latter part of the year when shoppers splash out on Christmas, boosting the bottom line. But will they do so this year?



It will take a miracle for any consumer-facing business not in the energy sector to put in a performance ‘beyond what we usually achieve in the second half’ this year



“We will need a substantial strengthening of performance, beyond what we usually achieve in the second half, to generate sufficient profit to share a partnership bonus with partners,” the partnership’s chair, Dame Sharon White, said in a letter to staff.

Frankly, it will take a miracle for any consumer-facing business not in the energy sector to put in a performance “beyond what we usually achieve in the second half” this year.

Dame Sharon has described the government’s energy prize freeze as “a potential game changer” for the consumer. I’m not convinced it is. Even with the freeze, energy prices will still be considerably higher than they were last Christmas. And it is not just energy that has eaten into the consumer’s resilience and reserves.

Food price inflation is running at a record 12 per cent. Every time people shop, they are finding less change in their wallets, whether that is the digital or the regular kind.

John Lewis is a brand you want to see on the High Street. Its ethos is admirable. Its workers are not drones, worth offering a miserable 35p an hour rise to for working in what to me looks very much like the equivalent of a Victorian mill, as happens at Amazon. They are partners. They have a stake.

But while the partnership is still standing at a time when many of its rivals are gathering dust in the corporate history books, this was still a bad result.

It's hard to argue with what the business is doing to address the issues it faces. While it dropped its famous "never knowingly undersold" pledge the business has done well with a value range. It has cut costs. It is trying to diversify. An example would be the rental homes it has built.

The partnership made a point of highlighting the £1.1bn in cash it's sitting on, plus the facility to call on £400m more. But it is also counting on the "loyalty" of its customers.

I'm not sure that's guaranteed any more. It is an uncomfortable fact that price is going to trump idealism for most people in the current climate. Even if that means shopping with people they don't necessarily like all that much.

John Lewis has repeatedly said that it has been in business for more than 150 years and intends to be in business for another 150 years. It is unfortunate, but I'm afraid that statement is now shrouded in a fog of uncertainty.

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Business news in brief



Ben van Beurden will step down later this year after close to a decade as chief executive of Shell (AFP/Getty)

Shell boss to step down at end of year

Ben van Beurden will step down later this year after close to a decade as chief executive of Shell. He will be replaced by the company's Canadian director of integrated gas, renewables and energy solutions, Wael Sawan. Under Mr Van Beurden's leadership Shell had to give up its "Royal Dutch" designation for the first time in more than 100 years, as it scrapped its listing in the Netherlands, and the firm pledged to become carbon net zero by 2050. *PA*

Amazon workers to vote on industrial action over pay

Hundreds of workers at online giant Amazon are to be balloted for strikes over pay. The GMB union said its members based in Coventry will be the first Amazon workers in the UK to take part in a formal industrial action ballot. The vote closes in mid-October, with any industrial action likely to take place in November, said the union.

GMB official Amanda Gearing said: “They’re being offered a 35p-an-hour pay rise during the worst cost of living crisis in a generation – and that’s from a company worth more than £1 trillion. Understandably, they are furious. Amazon can afford to do better. It’s not too late to avoid strike action and to get round the table with GMB to improve the pay and conditions of workers.”

Amazon has said previously: “Starting pay for Amazon employees has increased to a minimum of between £10.50 and £11.45 an hour, depending on location. This represents a 29 per cent increase in the minimum hourly wage paid to Amazon associates since 2018.” *PA*

Fears of recession to affect jobs’ market

Britain’s labour market is at a “turning point” after 10 months of hiring, according to a new report. Business advisory firm BDO expects recession fears will see a fall in the number of jobs on offer. Kaley Crossthwaite of BDO said the firm is awaiting “the first signs of a fall in employment figures”, adding: “We’re already seeing the impact of a challenging environment, with many businesses forced to make cuts and in some cases consider whether the business will continue to be viable.”

Sofa giant DFS sees profits slump by nearly a half

DFS has reported a big slump in profits and warned that the industry is facing a downturn, as soaring bills mean fewer customers are in the market for a new sofa. The business said

pre-tax profit dropped 43 per cent to £58.5m in the financial year that ended in June. Order numbers “softened markedly” in the past three months. “This has been the most operationally challenging year that we can remember, with industry-wide Covid-related supply chain issues, double-digit cost inflation on raw materials, and ongoing colleague absence and skill shortages,” said chief executive Tim Stacey. *PA*

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Toney handed Qatar carrot alongside tried and trusted



England manager Gareth Southgate has again put his faith in a core group of players with the World Cup now just a matter of weeks away (AFP/Getty)

MIGUEL DELANEY

If Gareth Southgate is planning any wild card for his World Cup squad, he is now going to leave it as late as possible to play that hand. The last England squad before Qatar, for next weekend's Nations League games against Italy and Germany, was predictable and only really notable for Eric Dier's return and names in for injury. Ivan Toney benefited from Marcus

Rashford's lack of fitness, Dean Henderson from Jordan Pickford's.

It illustrates that the main tension between now and the naming of the final squad is whether any fringe players can force themselves in, and any established players out. "There were certain players we wanted to keep involved this time, but that said it doesn't mean that this is the end for some of the others who aren't involved," Southgate explained.

While the inclusion of Dier and Toney should give players such as Harvey Elliott, Conor Gallagher and Ben White hope in that regard, the general feel of this squad indicates it is going to be a tough challenge for anyone on the outside. Even Trent Alexander-Arnold, whose form has led to renewed doubts, has stayed in.

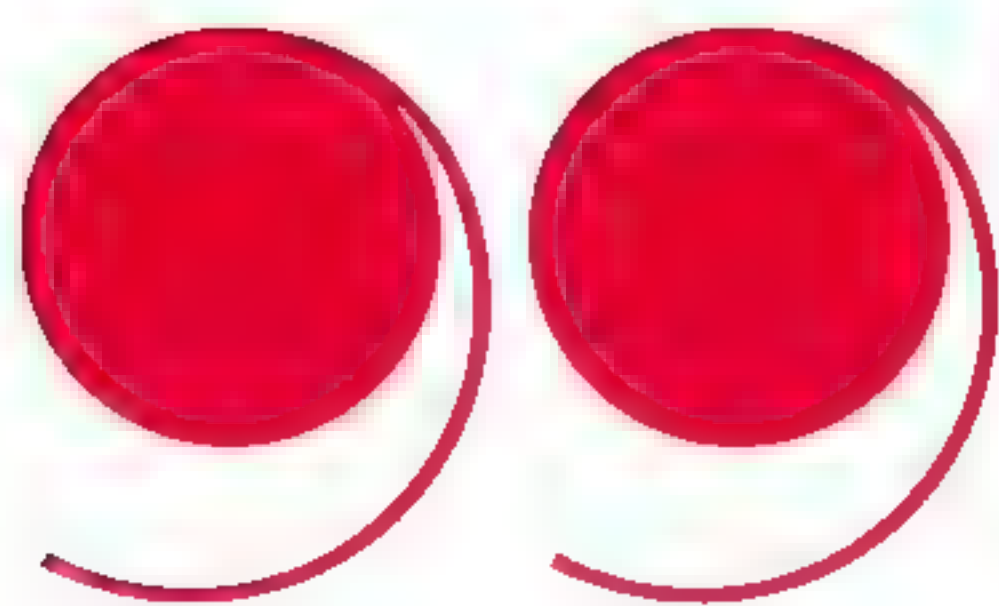
Southgate has overwhelmingly gone for the tried and trusted, just before a World Cup that is supposed to represent the peak of a cycle as well as a 10-year plan. There is a natural logic there alone – albeit one that also poses questions.

Southgate is admittedly in an almost invidious position here, with perception of every call dictated by twin pressures from either side of the tournament. One is of course the World Cup itself, which frames everything, and discussion around all of that fired by England's dismal June performances. On the other side, there are the actual tournament performances themselves, which will really dictate the merits of his decision-making.

If it goes well, all of this will be a masterstroke, and Southgate will have been vindicated for carefully building up a core he can trust. If he doesn't, it will be another sign of the staleness that has started to be talked about. Right now, at a remove of two months from the tournament, that is the unavoidable feel of this group. There's nothing all that exciting about it.



What a time to get your first call-up. There's a golden chance to make the World Cup, out of almost nowhere in terms of your international career



The flip side to that is that there aren't many names on the outside that feel like a necessity. It's not like Southgate has been reluctant to give players a chance, or that someone as talented as Jude Bellingham is insisting on his opportunity.

That is why, although many can point to Southgate's conservatism here, the real onus is on those not picked to considerably up their game. Toney should be their inspiration. On that, it shouldn't be overlooked that this is a real opportunity for the Brentford striker too. What a time to get your first call-up. There's a golden chance to make the World Cup, out of almost nowhere in terms of your international career. The timing of this really can't be overlooked. And just being around the squad will ensure that it's a lot more difficult for Southgate to overlook him. Club performances are only half of this, after all. Southgate usually makes final decisions on how players are around his camp, what they're like, how they train. It is why this break has much greater importance than usual.

That is why he has an advantage over figures like Elliott, although players like the Liverpool midfielder and Arsenal defender White can really only keep doing what they're doing with their clubs. There's enough time in that sense for them. There are also chances for those not getting much game time at all.

“Clearly, we have a number of players including Ben Chilwell, Luke Shaw, Harry Maguire and Calvin Phillips who are not playing a lot of minutes with their club,” said Southgate. “It is not ideal but we feel they have been, and can be, important players for us. It is not a perfect situation but there is still a lot of football to be played before Qatar.”

That was also highlighted with the returning – and the resurgent – Dier. “With Eric Dier, he has been playing well for a period of time. We think it is a really close call across our centre-backs and he has deserved to be back in the group. We know what a good character he is. He fits in with the culture and has great international experience and leadership qualities.”

Southgate otherwise spoke about a generally chaotic period, even if it won’t necessarily cause ructions in his selection.

“Reflecting on the last couple of months, clearly as an international manager, you don’t have any games to quickly put the disappointment behind you. We have had a long period to reflect but now we are really looking forward to two high-quality matches that will be a great test for us and a crucial part of our preparation for the World Cup. It is only eight weeks until we will be naming our squad for Qatar so every minute counts.”

That, for once, is very true of this international break.

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Haaland provides Man City with a sense of inevitability



Erling Haaland celebrates after scoring against his old club Borussia Dortmund (AP)

MARK CRITCHLEY

NORTHERN FOOTBALL CORRESPONDENT

Pep Guardiola had a simple request at the start of his post-match press conference. “Talk about John Stones, please” he begged, referencing the scorer of Manchester City’s spectacular first goal, as opposed to the scorer of their extraordinary second.

If it feels like we are all running out of new things to say about Erling Haaland, at least he is finding new ways of demonstrating his generational abilities.

The 13th goal of a City career that is still just nine games old was the best of all so far, not only for the circumstances in which it arrived – late on, against his former club, to secure a victory that the performance had barely deserved – but for the manner of it.

Joao Cancelo's deep, searching cross – played with the outside of his boot – looked like it may have been too deep and searching for even Haaland to connect with, until the Norwegian contorted his body like a kung-fu kick, in such a way as to rise his long left leg above his head but still manipulate the finish past the helpless goalkeeper.

Haaland hangs in mid-air as if the rest of his teammates are holding him up, with all his substantial heft and weight, or as though they have shifted him into position like a sort of medieval siege weapon. It becomes all the more impressive when you remember he gets up there all by himself.



Kung foo(tball): Haaland scoring an acrobatic goal (Getty)

Guardiola only saw a replay of the goal while conducting his round of post-match flash interviews. Once he had seen it up close, he drew a comparison to a similar one scored by his idol, mentor and inspiration Johan Cruyff for Barcelona against Atletico Madrid in 1973.

Known as “El Gol Imposible”, it is one of the most iconic in Barcelona’s history, so iconic, in fact, that back in July, as part of Joan Laporta’s rush to cover this summer’s extravagant spending, it had the honour of being the first piece of the club’s 122-year history to be auctioned off as a non-fungible token.

Guardiola dropped another name too. “I remember my dear friend [Zlatan] Ibrahimovic had this ability to put his leg on the roof. Erling is quite similar in that,” he said. “I think it is his nature. He is elastic, he is flexible and after that he has the ability to make the contact and put the ball in the net. I think his mum and dad give him that flexibility.”

While the likeness with Ibrahimovic is clear, Cruyff is not the most natural of comparisons for Haaland.

A footballing ideologue whose philosophy has influenced the leading tactician of this generation, it is hard to imagine the City striker doing the same when his playing career eventually ends sometime in the mid-to-late 2030s, at which point the rest of European football will get some much-needed respite.

It’s not that Haaland wouldn’t be capable of a successful coaching career. It’s just that, right now, it is difficult to imagine him doing anything other than scoring goals.



The Manchester City striker interacts with Jude Bellingham at the end of the game (Getty)

Even when he isn’t. During his 84-minute wait to write his name on the scoresheet for the sixth straight game, Haaland did

not particularly look like scoring. There was one shot from an acute angle into the side netting but other than that, no glaring misses, no dangerous runs in behind, not even a shot on target. Even so, a certain sense of inevitability persisted and was picked up on by the crowd.

One of his former teammates felt it too. “Yeah, I knew it [would be him], to be honest,” Jude Bellingham, the scorer of Borussia Dortmund’s goal, admitted. “Not many people know how to stop him. We did a really good job until maybe 88 minutes tonight and then he did what he does, unfortunately for us.”

Bellingham was arguably the best player on the pitch at the Etihad, not only the instigator of all Dortmund’s most dangerous counterattacks but a calming, controlling presence in midfield on a night when the Bundesliga side deserved more than they got.

He was caught on camera chatting with Haaland after the final whistle. Lip-readers will struggle to decipher the bulk of what was said but should have no problem working out Bellingham’s final words as they broke off the conversation: an exasperated “fuck’s sake”, through a knowing smile.

Perhaps, only six weeks into Haaland’s spell in Manchester, halfway through the September of his first season, that is already all there is to say.

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Chelsea on the back foot as Potter faces a new reality



Graham Potter began life at Stamford Bridge with a 1-1 draw against FC Salzburg (Getty)

JAMIE BRAIDWOOD

This may be the wrong question to ask after the eyes had peered down on Graham Potter and Chelsea were held to a 1-1 draw by FC Salzburg at Stamford Bridge – but what must Thomas Tuchel have been thinking?

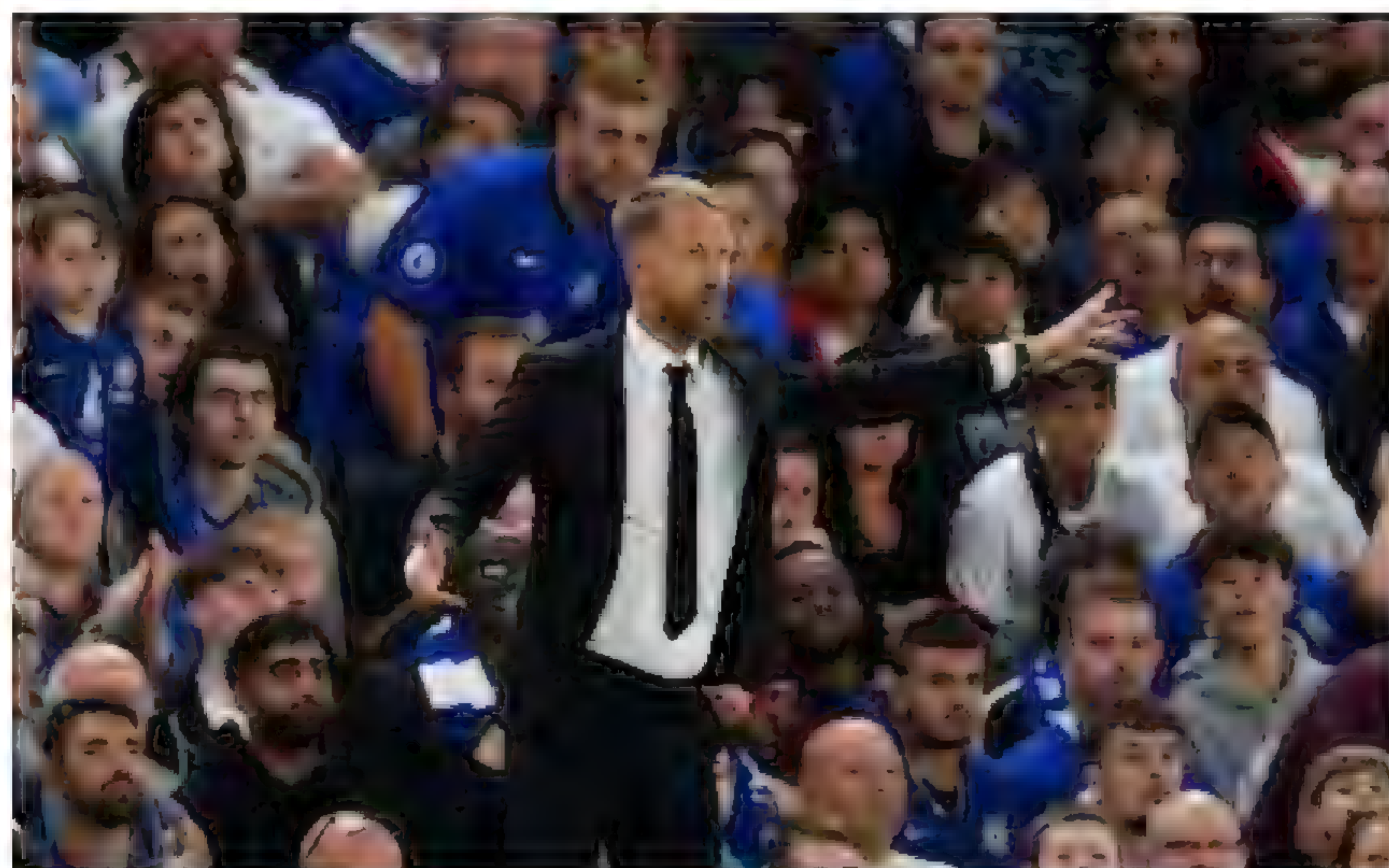
If Tuchel had the stomach to watch just a week on from his dismissal, in between chants of his name sung on the 21st

minute, he would have seen an energy and spark that was missing from the trauma of his final match in charge at Dinamo Zagreb. Perhaps he would have leaned back, grinning in both frustration and longing, at the memory of when those same players would perform that way for him.

But then Tuchel may have looked up and been hit with some more recent flashbacks, of missed chances, a lapse of concentration at the back and the concession of a cheap goal, a lack of control and a failure to kill off the game. For Tuchel, at the end, this version of Chelsea was more familiar to him but it is not his problem any longer.

Instead, it is Potter left frustrated by the feeling of a victory that slipped away, and who will be left to stew over the two dropped points that leave Chelsea in a tricky spot at the bottom of Group E in the Champions League. Although Chelsea's position is of course not his own making, one point from six already puts Potter on a bit of a back foot ahead of the doubleheader against AC Milan next month.

“It's not the position we want to be in but we have to respond,” Potter said, answering to the reality he faces now after his step up from Brighton. In an effort from the new owners to break from the past, the Englishman is set to be afforded time but Chelsea will still be expected to qualify from this group – even after this start.



Chelsea produced an improved display but were held back by familiar issues (Getty)

Potter is only one game into his Chelsea tenure but already, through no fault of his own, finds himself in an interesting situation. With the matches against Fulham and Liverpool postponed, he has been allowed time on the training ground to work with his new players and the early results were promising in Chelsea's best spells against Salzburg.

There is more time to come, with Chelsea's next fixture not until Crystal Palace on 1 October, but a chunk of that will be taken up by the majority of his squad being away on pre-World Cup internationals. It will be another far different experience to an international break at Brighton or Swansea.

The positives of his first match in charge, though, were fairly clear. Chelsea's system only needed a slight tweak but it released several players and created space for the ball to be played through. Salzburg have this season tended to deploy a narrow midfield diamond and so Raheem Sterling and Reece James were used out wide. Both were excellent and naturally benefitted from the gaps. The shape was fluid and there had clearly been some good work that promises much more and hints at further variety.

But although Potter was also pleased with his side's "attitude" and "application", this was a night that ultimately ended in frustration. His admission that Chelsea lost control of the game and lacked an edge to score the second goal was a reminder of why Chelsea and a squad that has seen a £260m injection of talent are where they are.

Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang has been signed to be Chelsea's goalscorer but faded after some early half-chances. Both he and Kai Havertz were the first to be brought off and if there were some lingering questions of Potter from his Brighton days, it would be that leading forwards tended to struggle in his teams. A lack of confidence, stemming from the final days of Tuchel and the deterioration of relationships at the club, is a key issue.

Potter has time to fix this. He does not, though, have matches. After Chelsea come back from the international break to face Crystal Palace, it will have been three weeks on from Potter's

debut when they return to Stamford Bridge again to face AC Milan. It's already a huge game and even if there are more positives to take from it, there will be pressure on Potter to address Chelsea's issues and deliver a result. It has not taken long for that reality at Chelsea to become apparent.

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WSL hoping the numbers add up, on and off the pitch



Chelsea sealed their third successive Women's Super League title on the last day of the season, holding off challengers Arsenal (Getty)

JAMIE BRAIDWOOD

A single point was the difference, millimetres in fact. Somehow, in the final moments of Arsenal's visit to Chelsea on a freezing night in February, they could not force the ball over the goal line

from close range. Three months later, Sam Kerr's outrageous volley from 35 yards dipped over the head of the England and Manchester United goalkeeper Mary Earps to wrap up Chelsea's third consecutive Women's Super League title. Arsenal had stumbled along the way but in a title race that went down to the wire, it was the finest of margins that cost them.

After a historic summer and a week on from the delayed start to the new WSL season, there is talk of distances once again. Not only is the renewed battle between Emma Hayes's all-conquering Chelsea side and Jonas Eidevall's Arsenal expected to be just as close, but England's landmark Euro 2022 victory in July has raised the possibilities for further strides and growth to be made as the domestic game returns. The confirmation last week of Barcelona smashing the world transfer record to sign Keira Walsh from Manchester City, making the England midfielder the most expensive female footballer of all time, is a sign of what to expect.



Leah Williamson and Millie Bright lift the Euro 2022 trophy after England's victory over Germany on 31 July (Getty)

Progress is invariably mentioned at around this time each year. It was so ahead of the last WSL campaign, as a new broadcasting rights deal opened the league up to bigger TV audiences. There have since been reports of a fourfold increase in viewing hours, while the drama of the season and its various twists and turns lived up to its wider stage. The Lionesses' victory at Wembley has now raised expectations and this time the focus will be on

the stands and the numbers coming through the gates. Euro 2022 showed the way with record attendances across the tournament, topped by the record 87,000 that saw England's 2-1 win over Germany.

"We want them to come to WSL games," England captain and Arsenal defender Leah Williamson said just minutes after beating Germany, instantly understanding the importance of her team's moment. For now, England's overall success, which was followed by the news of their October friendly against the world champions the United States being sold out within 24 hours, appears to have been replicated. Williamson's Arsenal have now sold 45,000 tickets for next weekend's north London derby against Tottenham, in what will be a WSL record.

There has, though, been an early blow. The postponement of football following the death of Queen Elizabeth II arguably impacted the WSL more than the Premier League on what was set to be a grand opening to the season. Chelsea were scheduled to get their title defence under way at Stamford Bridge, a first match there in three years, while Tottenham were set to open the season against Manchester United at the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium. Rearranging those fixtures in their intended stadiums is not impossible but it may prove difficult, and the sense of a triumphant return following the Euros could be lost.



Chelsea's Sam Kerr has won the WSL golden boot two years in a row (The FA/Getty)

At least several of the country's biggest stadiums have also been opened up. Aston Villa and Leicester are at home this weekend, while Liverpool, Manchester City and United will play matches at Anfield, the Etihad and Old Trafford respectively over the opening weeks of the season.

On the pitch, attention returns to a league that benefited from an injection of unpredictability last season. Clashes between the top teams have underlined its quality but it was results such as bottom-side Birmingham's victory over Arsenal and Reading's win over Chelsea that opened up the title race. That said, Chelsea still reeled off nine wins in a row following February's goalless draw against Arsenal. In a 12-team league, those results against title rivals remain that bit more significant to its outcome.

Chelsea will be favourites to retain their crown, even if the challenge facing Hayes to maintain her team's standards gets harder every year. Although there is plenty of focus on England's stars ahead of the new season following the success of Euro 2022, it is the Australian striker Kerr who remains the WSL's brightest star and carries the biggest impact. Kerr swept the individual awards last season after scoring 20 league goals and highlighting her knack for producing the sensational at vital times, much like Chelsea's ability under Hayes to simply get over the line. As well as the star quality of Kerr, Fran Kirby and Pernille Harder, they have skilled grafters in Guro Reiten, Erin Cuthbert and Millie Bright.



Arsenal's title challenge will again lean heavily on stars Vivianne Miedema (centre) and Beth Mead (Getty)

They remain the winning machine that Arsenal will be desperate to stop. Vivianne Miedema has extended her stay for one more season, in a huge boost to not just the Gunners but the WSL as a whole, while Beth Mead will be looking to take another step forward after winning the golden boot at the Euros. Eidevall will again have strength in his forward positions but is likely to find them more to his liking as striker Stina Blackstineus prepares for her first full season. Williamson is now one of the league's most recognisable players and has the experience to lead her team to another breakthrough, over three years on from Arsenal's last title. The Gunners host Brighton & Hove Albion at Meadow Park this evening (kick-off 7.30pm) in the season's opening fixture.

Over the final weeks of last season, Manchester City showed form to suggest they could make it a three-way fight. But while Gareth Taylor's side were decimated by injuries over the first few weeks of last season, they have now been torn apart by departures. Walsh's move to Barcelona came a day before the transfer deadline and followed the exits of Lucy Bronze, Georgia Stanway and Caroline Weir, while Ellen White has retired.

They may be the most intriguing side to watch over the first few weeks of the season and it could leave a place in the top three open for the first time in eight years. Manchester United fell

short last season but feature two of England's biggest stars of the summer in Alessia Russo and Ella Toone, both aged 23 and ready to take the next step in their development and impact as a partnership. Mark Skinner's side have since added depth to their attacking options in Spain forward Lucia Garcia and England's Nikita Parris.



City, now without Keira Walsh, will face competition from United in the battle for a top-three finish (Getty)

Beneath the top four, there has perhaps been a lack of investment or ambition needed to bridge the gap. It would not take much, relatively, for clubs already spending millions of transfer fees in the Premier League. Speaking of which, Liverpool's promotion back from the Championship and Birmingham's relegation means that Reading are the only club without a Premier League presence left in the WSL – the lowest figure since its inaugural season in 2011.

There is another sub-plot here, away from the pitch. The Euros bring opportunity but also pressure for the FA, which looks after the WSL, to capitalise on the summer success. It comes amid calls, including from Hayes, that the WSL could benefit from the Premier League's "expertise" as the women's game looks to build on the initial years of professionalism and the injection of interest a turning point like Euro 2022 could bring.

Success off the pitch has to be a continuation of the record-breaking numbers and the game's wider growth. On it, though,

it will be again measured by much finer margins.

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Sport news in brief



Cristiano Ronaldo scored his 699th club goal in last night's Europa League tie (AFP/Getty)

Ronaldo and Sancho on target as Man United win in Moldova

Jadon Sancho and Cristiano Ronaldo both made points as Manchester United eased to a 2-0 victory over Sheriff Tiraspol in the Europa League. Sancho was on target hours after being left out of the England squad and Ronaldo scored his first of the season from the spot as United brushed off the Moldovans in Chisinau to register their first points of the group stage.

The result ensured United's campaign was up and running after defeat in their Group E opener against Real Sociedad at Old Trafford last week. Sancho, perhaps stung into action by his omission from the national side, finished superbly in the 17th minute after collecting the ball from Christian Eriksen on the edge of the area. The former Borussia Dortmund star cleverly wrong-footed a defender with a couple of smart touches and guided in a shot off the base of the post.

Sheriff responded well as Iyayi Atiemwen cut inside from the left and shot narrowly wide before also going close from a free-kick before United's second came from the penalty spot after Dalot was carelessly tripped by Patrick Kpozo. Ronaldo struck coolly from 12 yards with a shot straight down the middle, his 699th goal of a glittering club career. The home side pressed further in the closing minutes but United were not troubled as they held out for victory. *PA*

West Ham given scare by Silkeborg

Gianluca Scamacca scored a cracker but West Ham United made hard work of a 3-2 victory at Danish side Silkeborg in the Europa Conference League.

The Italy striker, a £30m summer signing from Sassuolo, scored with a stunning strike in between a penalty from Manuel Lanzini and Craig Dawson's header.

But it was not all plain sailing for David Moyes's side as, just as they had against Romanian side FCSB a week ago, they conceded the first goal. Silkeborg stunned the Premier League team by taking the lead after just five minutes. The ball was pulled back for Kasper Kusk to sidefoot past wrongfooted Hammers keeper Alphonse Areola from the edge of the area. And they were hanging on for the final 15 minutes after Soren Tengstedt pulled one back before eventually making it two wins from two in Europe this season. *PA*

All Blacks beat Australia in Rugby Championship classic

Jordie Barrett grabbed a try after the siren as New Zealand edged Australia 39-37 in a Melbourne classic to win the Bledisloe Cup for a 20th year in succession and move a step closer to back-to-back Rugby Championship crowns.

In a controversial finish at Marvel Stadium, French referee Mathieu Raynal took the ball from fly half Bernard Foley for time-wasting, even though the clock was off as he was poised to kick a penalty clear from defence with Australia holding a three-point lead. Gifted possession, the All Blacks spread the ball wide to Barrett, who crossed in the left corner as a crowd of 53,245 gasped.

It was a bruising contest, with a slew of injuries on both sides, including both the teams' captains. All Blacks skipper Sam Cane clashed heads with midfield teammate David Havili in the first half, and both were ruled out of the match.

"Obviously there was a lot of carnage out there, a fair few injuries," Cane said. "To win it on the buzzer we're obviously hugely delighted. To the Aussie boys – what a Test match." Barrett's cool finish secured the trans-Tasman Bledisloe Cup that the All Blacks have held since 2003 with a match to spare.

In a clash featuring four yellow cards – three given to the hosts – All Blacks hooker Samisoni Taukei'aho grabbed a try at the start of each half, while fly half Richie Mo'unga and Will Jordan also crossed in a three-minute burst after the break.

The Wallabies rallied bravely with a late brace of tries by winger Andrew Kellaway, and Pete Samu nearly brought the roof down with a stunning try assisted by Marika Koroibete in the 73rd minute and a long-range Nic White penalty put the hosts in front before the late drama.

"Absolutely gutted. I actually don't know what to say," said the Wallabies' stand-in captain James Slipper, who came off early with a calf problem. "We just fell short there. It's probably the most gutting way to finish."

The win keeps the defending champions the All Blacks top of the Rugby Championship table on 14 points, four ahead of

Australia, who grabbed a bonus point in defeat. Argentina and South Africa, on nine points, face off in Buenos Aires tomorrow.

Reuters

Former international umpire Asad Rauf dies, aged 66

Former international umpire Asad Rauf has died from a cardiac arrest, the International Cricket Council (ICC) has said. Rauf, who stood as an on-field umpire in 49 Test matches, was part of the ICC's elite panel of umpires between 2006 and 2013. His career ended abruptly in 2013 when he was named as part of an alleged spot-fixing scandal in the Indian Premier League, for which he was subsequently banned.

The 66-year-old died in his native Pakistan on Wednesday. Chair of the Pakistan Cricket Board Ramiz Raja said on Twitter:

“Saddened to hear about passing of Asad Rauf. Not only was he a good umpire but also had a wicked sense of humour. He always put a smile on my face and will continue to do so whenever I think about him. Many sympathies with his family for their loss.”

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